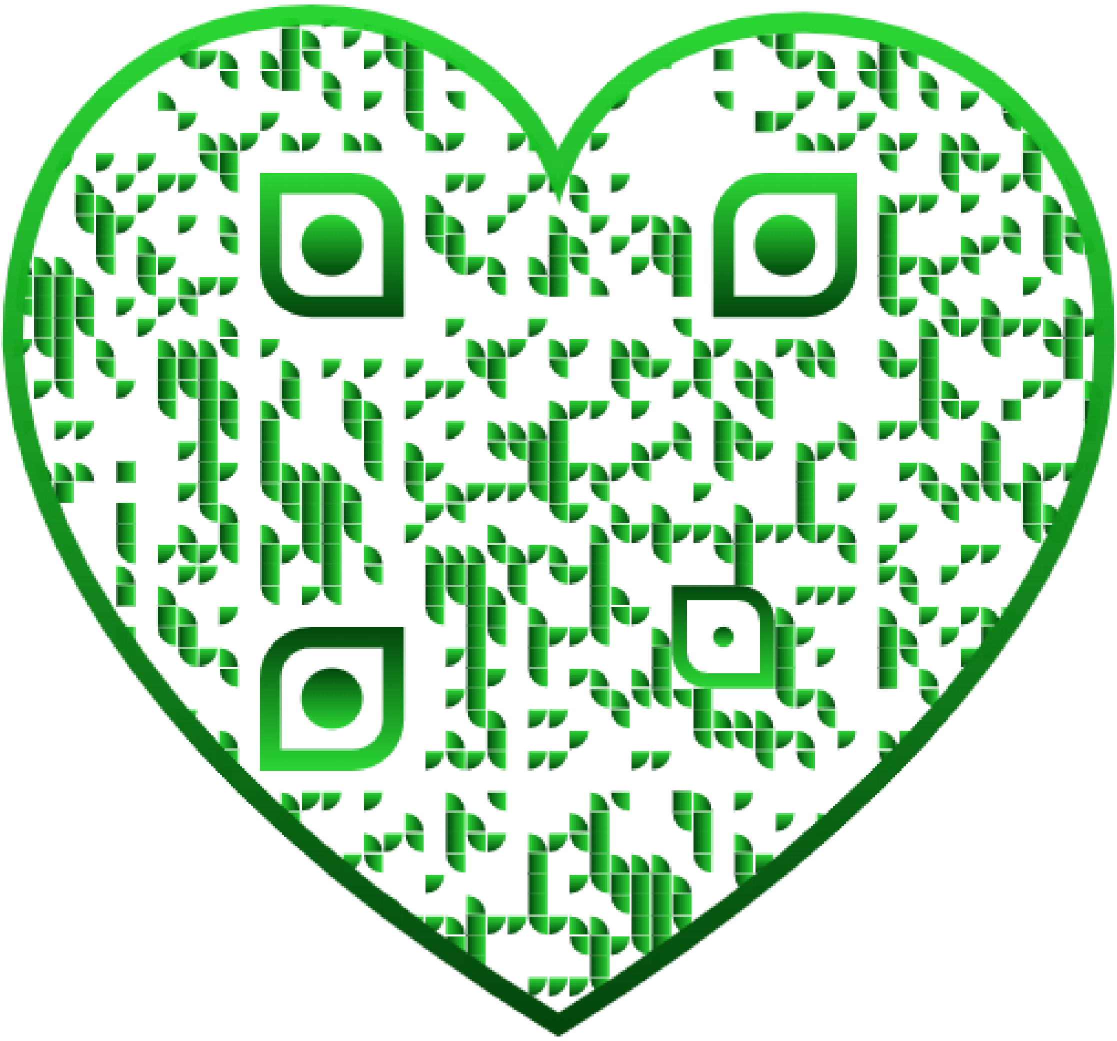
Argument

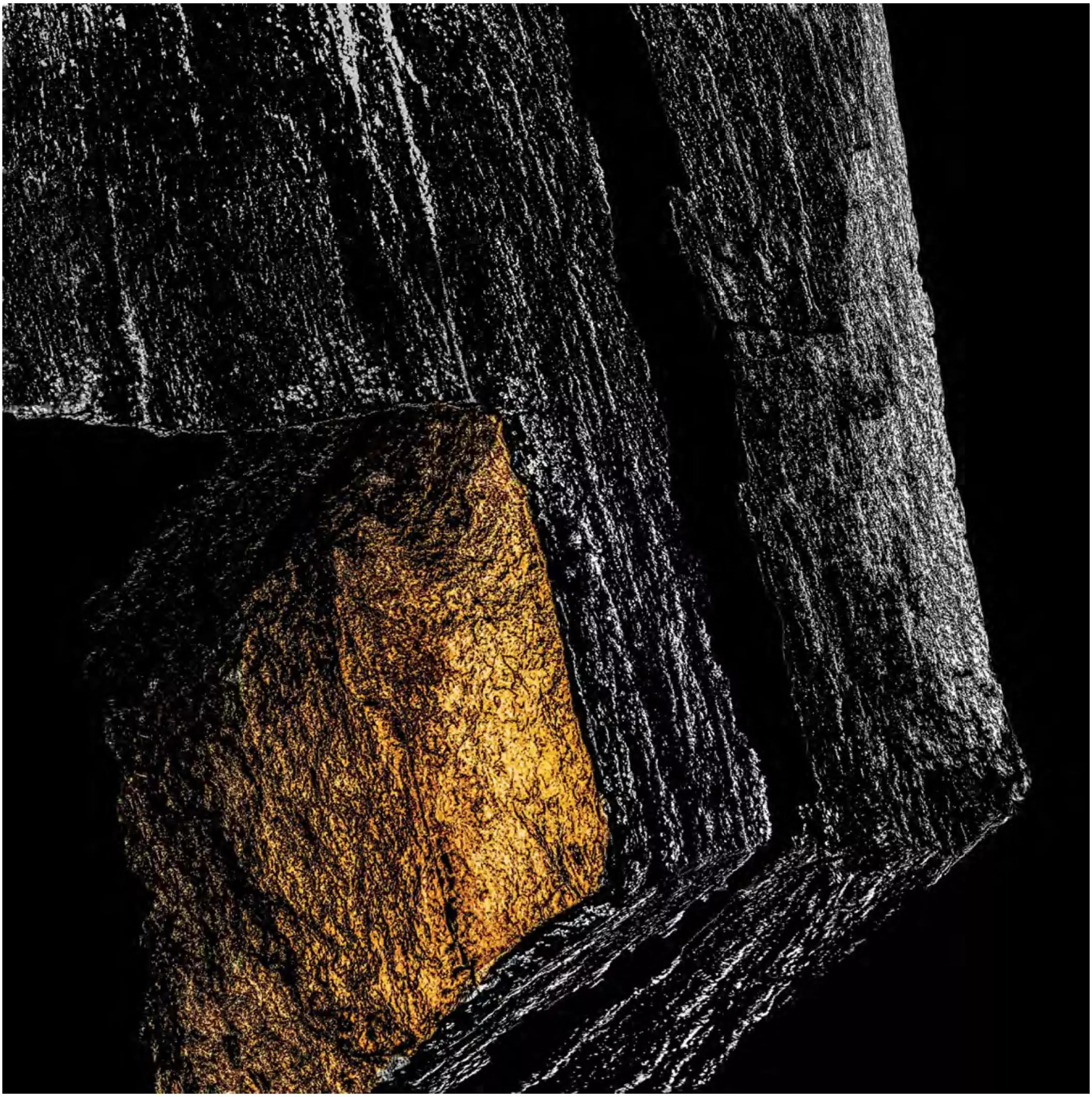
Artistic and literary review

14

October November
December 2025

ISSN 2825-9319
€25.00





Cover image in 1re :

Marina Mankarios, Tetris antique #3,
plaster sculpture, 46.5 x 34 x 7 cm,
2023

Cover image in twoe :

Jean-Luc Labrette, De Materia 29,
photographic print, printed on
brushed aluminium, 60 x 60 cm, 2025

Argument

Art and literary review

The art journal that gives artists a voice

Editorial

Ancient and modern mythologies are the theme of this issue!

Argument magazine presents its fourteenth issue, focusing on ancient and modern mythologies, an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists.

We are pleased to present ten visual artists, one author and two exhibition curators from eight countries and five continents:

Hélène Barrier
Dina Goldstein
Fatima Golem
Nagham Hodhaifa
Jean-Luc Labrette
Patrick McGrath Muñiz
Marina Mankarios
Marie Ménestrier Yosra
Mojtahedi
Emmanuel Reiatua Cuisinier
Stefanos Rokos
Clara Tournay
Lin Xiang Xiong

The **Argument** magazine project was born from the idea of bringing together works, readers and artists through interviews, and designing the whole thing as a collective exhibition with the artists at the centre of the discourse.

You will not find any advertising here; this is a deliberate choice to maintain our independence.

You can purchase the print edition on the magazine's website and digital versions on Cafeyn, PressReader, Readly, Scopalto, and Kono Magazine platforms. We are distributed in bookshops by Les Petits Éditeurs and listed with Electre and Dilicom.

We want to create a direct link between the public, the works and the artist.

It is the artists who matter above all else:
They write the world with matter,
They share their visions and dreams with us,
Playing with shapes and colours.
They radiate poetry, wisdom and emotion.

We hope to see you every quarter with a new issue or special editions such as the one on Palestinian artists that we released in May 2025, which you can purchase at the bookshop of the Arab World Institute in Paris.

I hope you enjoy reading it!

François Beauxis-Aussalet
Publishing Director

Mythologies ancient and modern

Issue 14
October 2025

Editorial committee:

Eduardo Pérez Viloria
Rachel Hardouin
Alexandre Ortiz Hervias
Adeline Bailleux
Axelle Delorme
Fatima Gholem
Emmanuelle Callerame
Ramsés Luquis Ortega
Kim Chi Pho
François Beauxis
Michèle Beauxis

Contributors:
Jennifer Lemoy: graphic designer
Léa Rimoux: graphic designer
Lucie Ayrault: graphic designer
Eni Reves: graphic designer
Maxine Courtabessis: graphic designer
Karoliina Hujanen: graphic designer
Claire Savouré: proofreader
Audrey Boon: website

Publishing director François Beauxis-Aussalet
redaction@revue-argument.fr

ISBN: 978-2-487929-14-2
ISSN: 2825-9319 print edition in French
ISSN: 3075-7053 digital edition in French
ISSN: 3003-2679 print edition in English
ISSN: 3075-707X digital edition in English
ISSN: 3075-7088 digital edition in Spanish

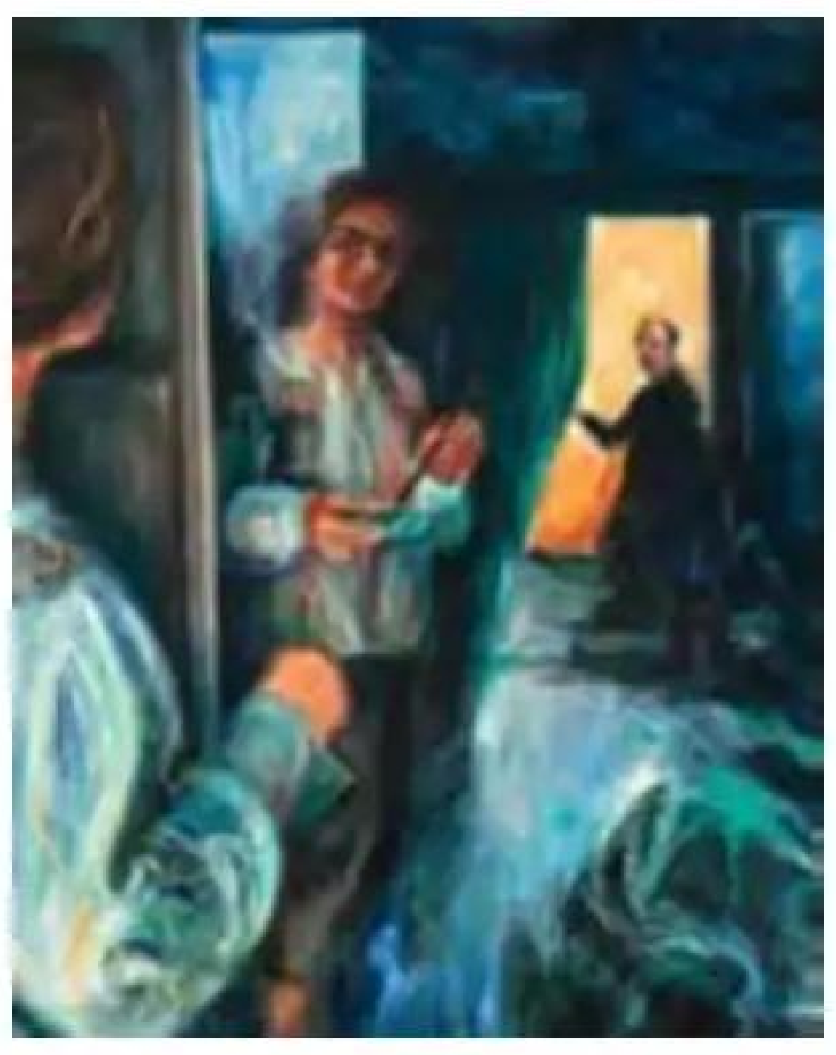
Legal deposit date: 15 June 2022

Printer
Pixartprinting S.p.A.
Via 1 Maggio, 8
30020 Quarto d'Altino
VE, Italy

Publisher
Association magazine Argument
Artistic and literary publication
Registered office: 1 bis, rue
Gambetta 64200 Biarritz

Summary

Marina Mankarios 06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Marina Mankarios

Axelle Delorme

Marina Mankarios, born in France in 1996, is a French-Egyptian sculptor living and working in Paris. A graduate of ENSAAMA–Olivier-de-Serres
In art and design, she explores the notions of memory and forgetting, questioning our relationship with time through the artistic appropriation of ancient fragments. Marina Mankarios experiments with moulding techniques, using processes of collage, displacement and deformation specific to the literature of the absurd, and appropriates the visual vocabulary of ruins to create works that freeze time like a freeze frame, a pause before a seemingly imminent fall.

→ **1** Portrait of Marina Mankarios, Albert Khan Museum, 2025

→ **2** Vacuum Memory (details), vacuum-formed plaster sculpture, 20 x 15 x 7 cm, 2023

Amidst the ruins and fragmented remains of a lost city, we press on. Amongst the ruined busts, suddenly, something catches our attention. A detail, an incongruity. Marina Mankarios transports us, as our epic journey unfolds, into the contemplation of a fragmented, reconstructed reality with surrealist overtones. An imaginary civilisation, composed entirely of fragments, unfolds before our eyes. It assembles and operates, multiplies, disturbs and unbalances matter, creating space for new narratives. Our perception, initially unsettled, adapts, becomes accustomed and discovers. Pure and smooth, its pieces are only so in appearance.

Playing with hollows and solids, giving her sculptures gashes or large voids that amputate them, twisting or joining them together like pieces of an impossible puzzle, Marina Mankarios creates a sense of double meaning in our minds, influenced first by the careful and demanding forms she gives to her work, then deepened and nourished by the twists she imprints on them. She first captivates us by representing images that seem familiar and comfortable, drawn from our memory and culture, and then feeds us with her interpretation of them, which is resolutely contemporary and grounded.

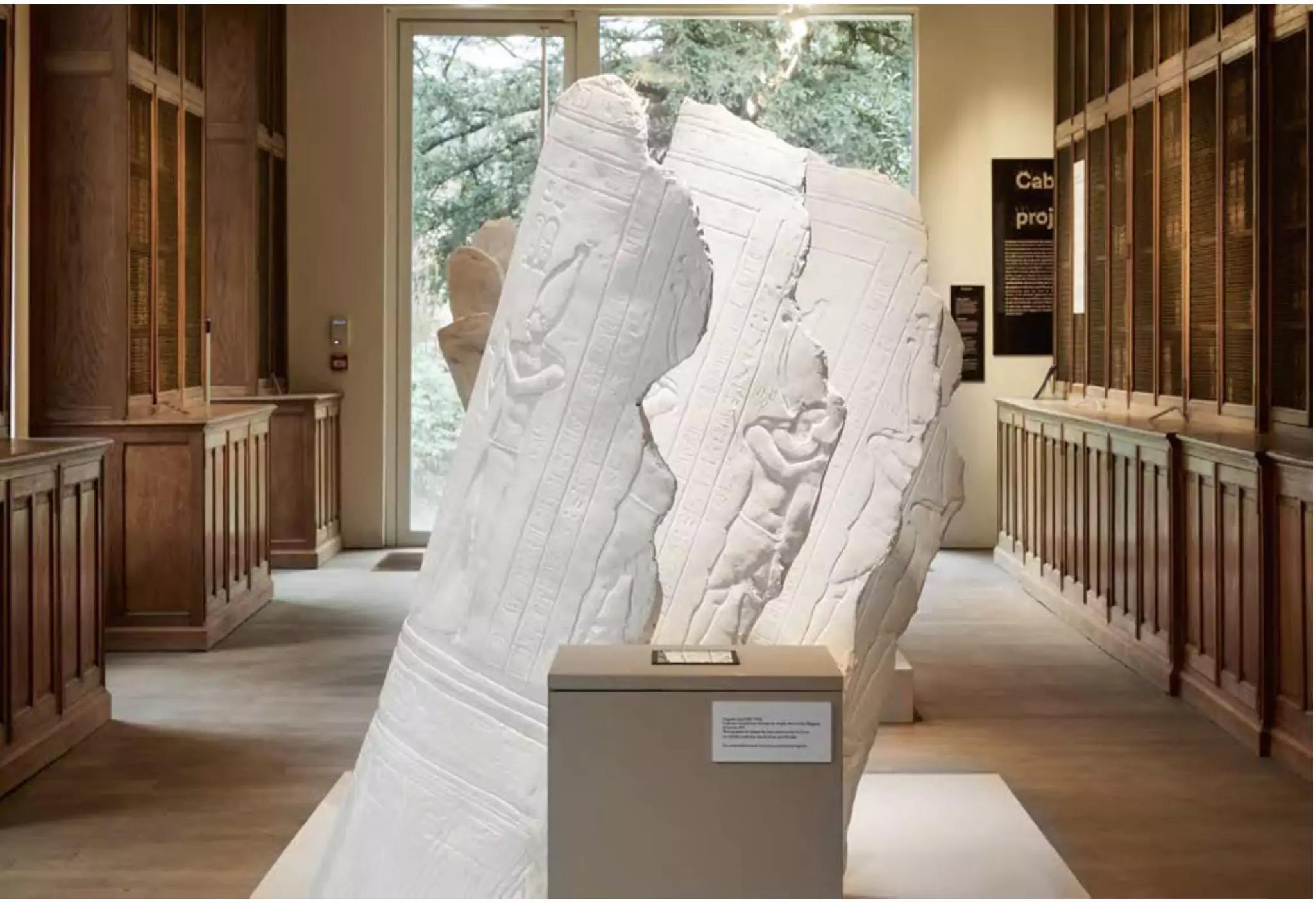
Here, moulding is far from being a single object of study; it is used as a tool and a medium. With their dazzling whiteness and masterful lines and shapes, Marina Mankarios' works challenge us. Aesthetic canons engraved in marble, grandiose and immutable ancient statuary, a repertoire of classical sculpture and architecture... All these initial considerations are slowly dissolved in a game of deception that Marina Mankarios subtly sets up. A step aside, which makes us smile and then grasp the hidden intention between the meanders of materials. Marina Mankarios imitates in order to enrich and increase our attention to detail so that we can grasp the entirety of what she is telling us.

Like an archaeologist, she unveils pieces before our eyes which, by unearthing references from the past and working on them to transform them, ultimately evoke our own era, its challenges and its history. She takes us to see what lies beyond the mirror, on the other side of the works, in those hollows and voids, the invisible narrative they contain and whisper in our ears. Marina Mankarios thus questions us about our methods of conservation, of protecting memory, of transmitting heritage, of the thorny subject of forgetting, of archiving and of loss through looting, trafficking and destruction. She emphasises the fragility of objects, but also their power, as they endure throughout history and in power games. She works to restore her casts to their role as guardians and receptacles, to remember and offer our civilisation solid foundations that are neither smoke nor mirrors.

What is your background, the path that led you to develop your current approach?

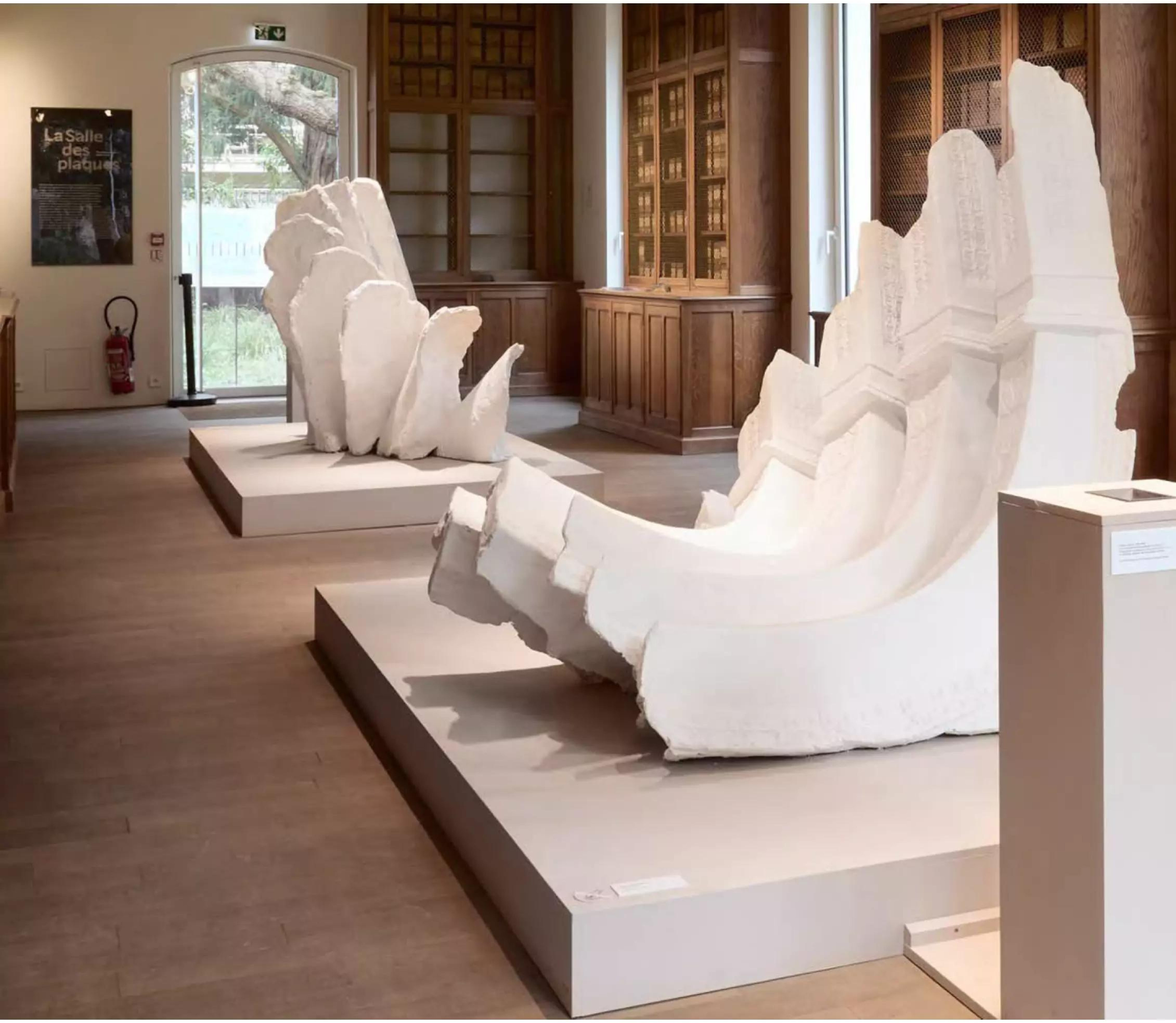
I began my artistic journey by studying different practices when I was younger. I first trained in classical music and theatre for many years before my baccalaureate. Then I started drawing and experimenting with several disciplines when I enrolled in an "applied arts refresher" course. That's when I decided to focus on product design. I enrolled at the Olivier-de-Serres school, but ultimately, this training wasn't right for me because the approach to creation was very pragmatic. So I turned my attention back to the arts and crafts, also at Olivier-de-Serres.

During this course, I completed internships in statue moulding workshops, which served as the starting point for the design of my final year project, which I completed to obtain my degree. I called this project "Moulding is not copying", which led to my current work. Sculpture therefore came quite late in my career, as I progressed through my internships, discovering plaster, silicone, etc., and began to master these tools.



↓ **3** Kôm Ombo, plaster sculpture, 150 x 150 x 240 cm, 2025

→ **4** Ancient Tetris #3, plaster sculpture, 46.5 x 34 x 7 cm, 2023



↑ **5** Palmyre, plaster sculpture, 160 x 150 x 240 cm, 2025

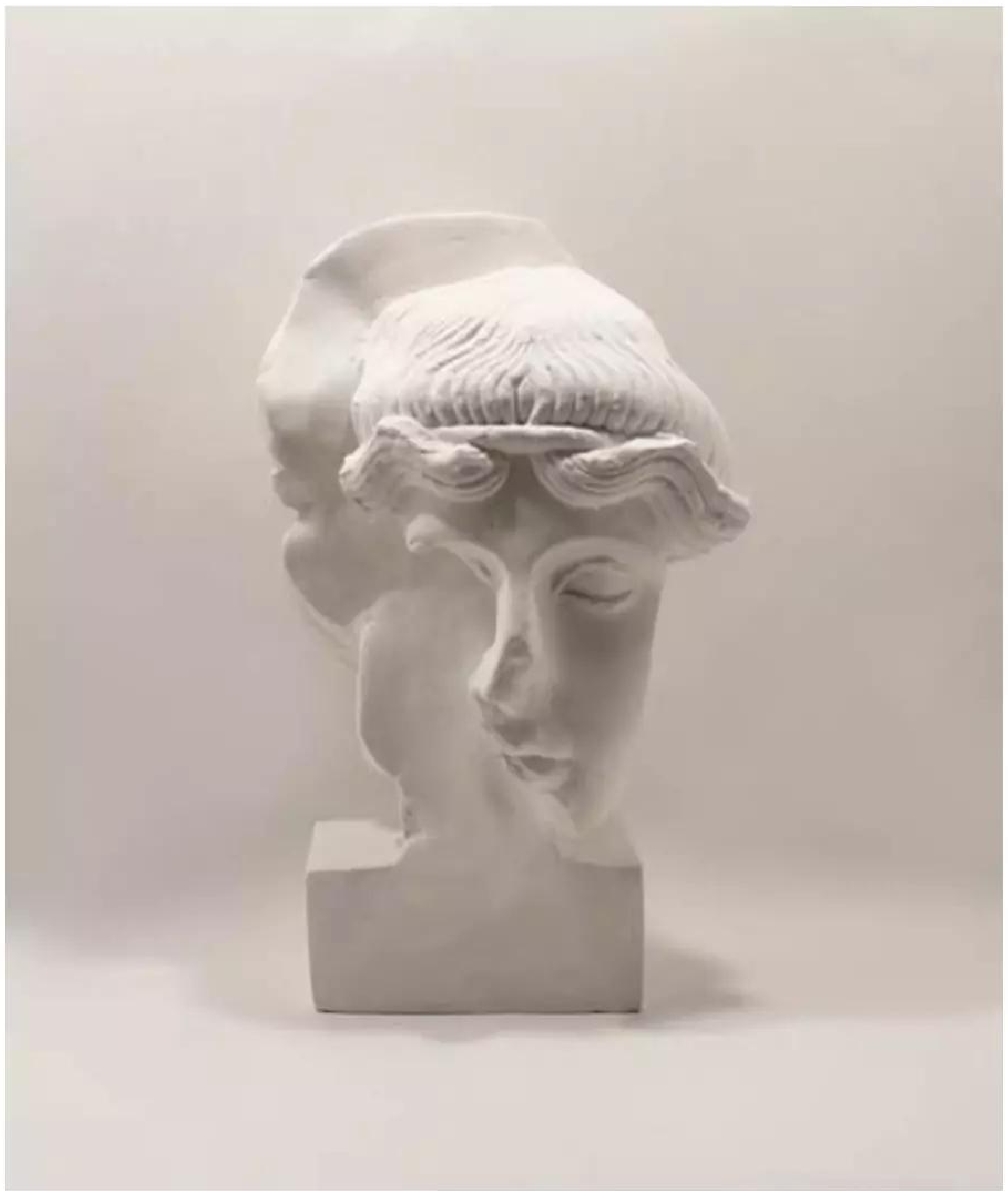
How would you define your universe, your aesthetic, your inspirations?

In my process, I often draw inspiration from works or references that use classical codes. I use elements, signs and language that many people are familiar with, and then I shift and rearrange this vocabulary to create something new, more poetic and symbolic.

I also find surrealism to be an important source of inspiration. Artists such as Meret Oppenheim and her fur-covered cup spring to mind. The idea here is to represent an everyday object, a familiar shape, and offer a different interpretation by incorporating a new narrative. By mixing several elements, she creates an encounter between two things that, in principle, should not coexist. It is a poetics that I find extremely powerful and which greatly nourishes my practice.

I could also mention a specific attraction to the aesthetics of ruins, that melancholic world that can be found in particular in the works of painters such as Hubert Robert.

These are references which, without being limited to them, fuel my research, in whose footsteps I follow, and echo my approach.



↑ **6** Fragment #9, plaster sculpture, 28 x 14 x 13 cm, 2021

→ **7** Ancient Tetris #2, plaster sculpture, 34 x 21 x 7 cm, 2023

How do you use the mould in your work? Can you tell us about your process?

The use of moulds has been a real catalyst throughout my artistic project. When I did internships in moulding workshops and discovered this technique, I realised that I had at my disposal a huge range of different techniques for making reproductions. I wanted to explore this tool as a lever for creative freedom and interpretation: that is, to use the mould as a medium, just like a paintbrush, rather than simply to make copies. Gradually, I deepened my research, exploring the conceptual tension I raised between representation and reproduction: how can representations be made using a tool considered to be a medium for reproducibility? I also had in mind the idea of studying all the meanings of the term "reproduction" by exploring the act of creating something new. So I played on the matrix aspect contained in the mould.

My initial intention was therefore to use this process to move towards creating unique pieces.

My process can be described as follows: I start by collecting photos or models that I want to work with, I make a clay model, which I coat with several layers of silicone, and on top of which I create a plaster shell to maintain the shape I want to give it. I can then obtain fragments by partially filling the parts of the mould with plaster. Finally, with all the pieces I recover from the mould, I create compositions by assembling each piece together, according to a creative process that takes place at that moment.

How do you manage to achieve a form that differs from the ancient canons that inspire you, in order to question rather than simply offer a reinterpretation?

This research has allowed me to explore several processes.

The first was that of the fragment. I wanted to create an effect of disruption within codes that we are familiar with, by destabilising their legibility and changing the way they are read. My intention was to make the viewer want to walk around the work, with the reflex to mentally reconstruct the model, while being disturbed by the visible discrepancies, gaps and absurdities in the composition.

I also studied deformation. Silicone allows for a great deal of flexibility in the work, and I was able to pull pieces that looked like they were liquid. This research was ultimately quite short-lived, as I quickly explored all the possibilities of this technique and the avenues it offered me.

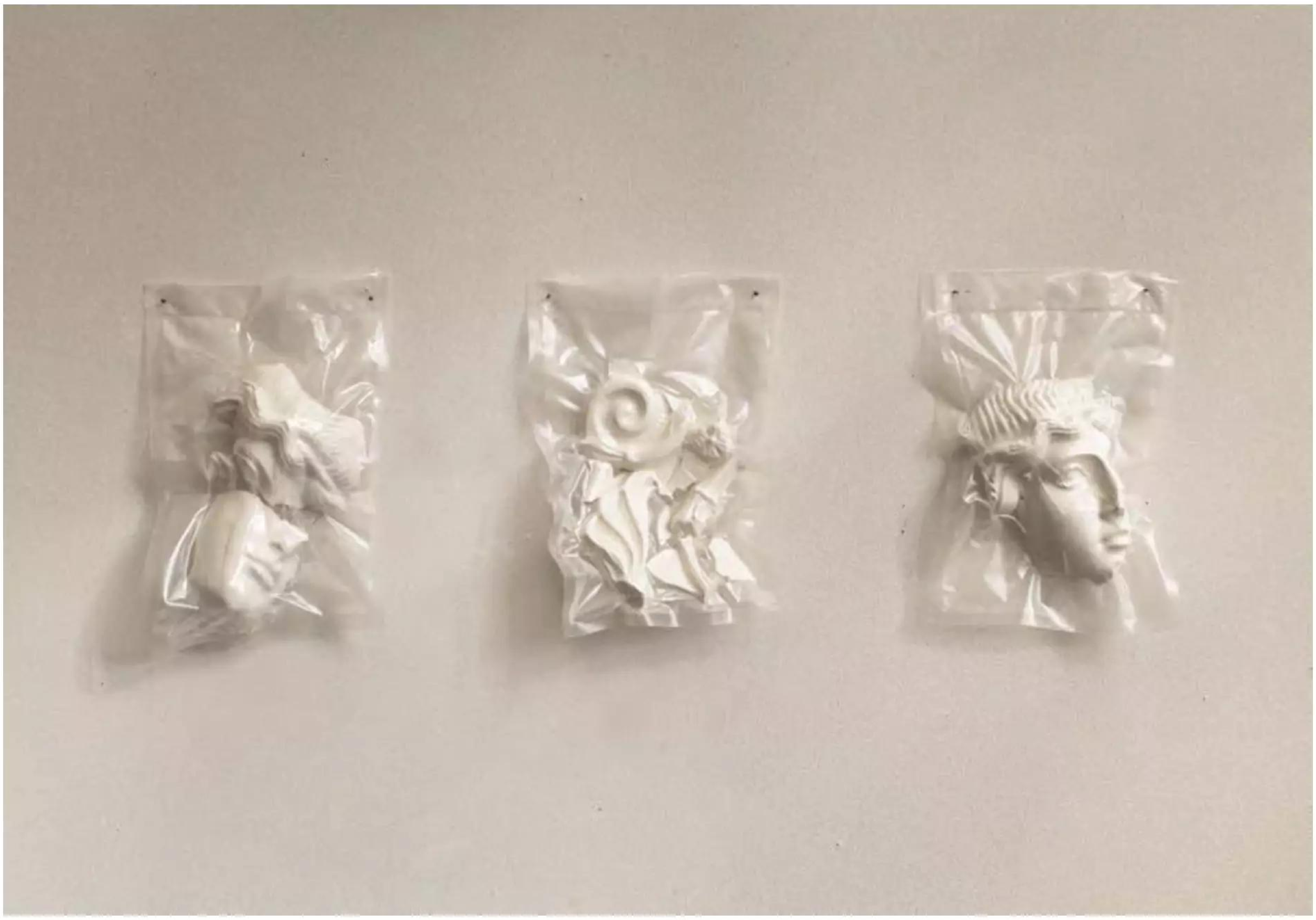
What interests me most today is the encounter between the ancient model and another element, sometimes more trivial, to create a new question. For example, I have a work called Des restes (Remains), in which I have arranged fragments of mussels, like crumbs, on a plate. In the pieces from the "Ancient Tetris" series, I cut out pieces of faces and assembled them, as in a video game.

The challenge is to create a shock, generate a new poetics and propose a new reflection based on this unexpected encounter. My questioning does not revolve around Greek statuary or ancient myths as such, but rather serves as a starting point for exploring different directions.

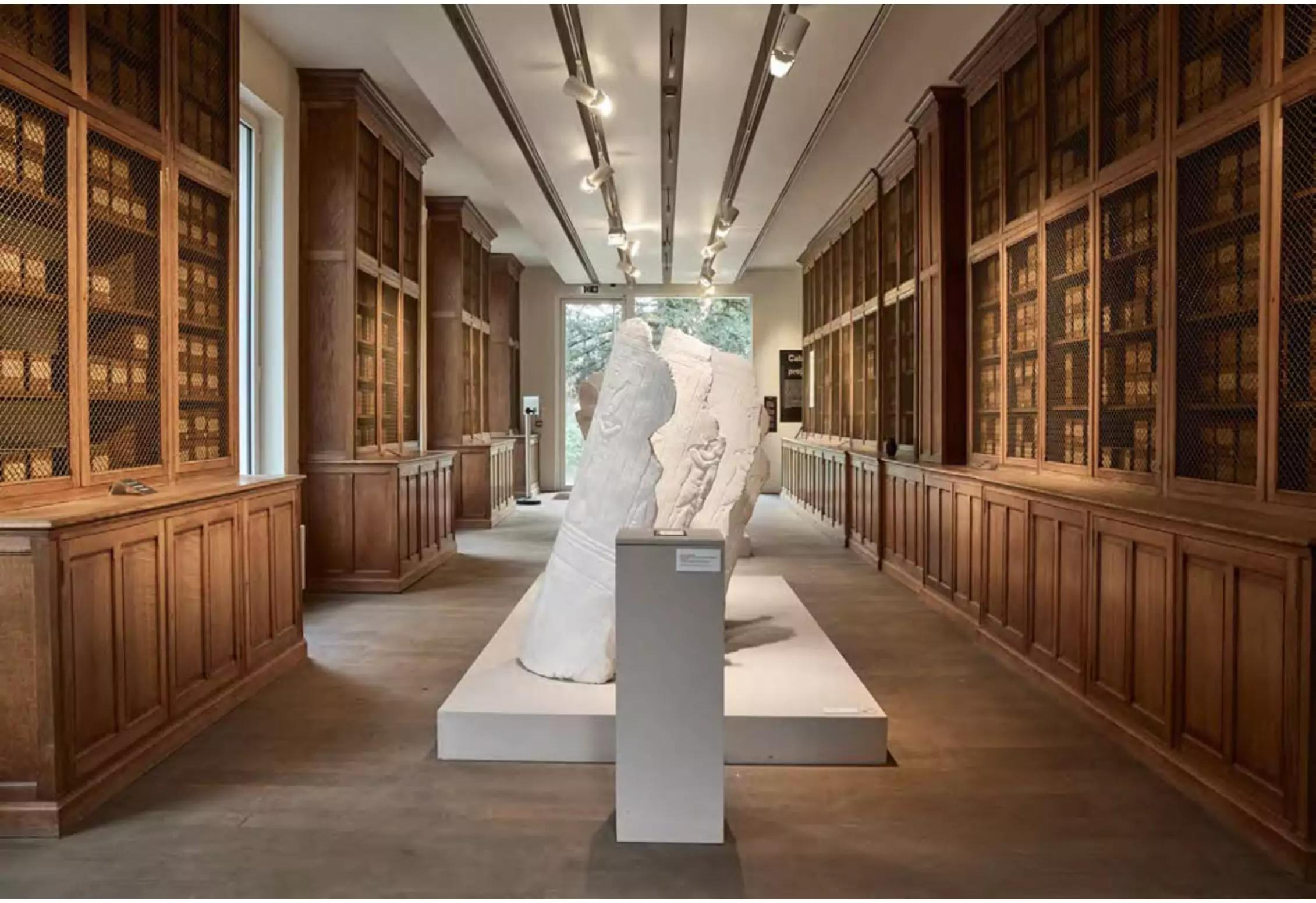
So you are proposing to create new poetics, new myths, or at least to renew our perspective on these founding canons?

These different processes have led me to question the subjects I work on more broadly. Recently, at the Albert Kahn Museum, I was able to explore the issue of heritage disappearing due to climatic or political causes in Syria and Egypt, for example, in an exhibition entitled "Lost Models". Working with fragments has allowed me to raise very contemporary questions related to these issues: Mémoire sous vide (Memory in a Vacuum), for example, is a small fragment of sculpture that I vacuum-packed, as one would do with a piece of meat, and which addresses the issue of looting and trafficking of works of art and heritage objects. This piece suggests that it is ready to be sold under the counter.

When it comes to myths themselves, I never talk about the underlying stories, because that's not what interests me. I offer a new interpretation of forms, adding a sense of imbalance, disrupting something established. By distorting and re-examining these ancient statues, I express more of what I feel about the imbalance in our civilisation. Thanks to what ancient statuary offers me in terms of aesthetics – respected proportions, idealisation, formal canons – I summon the very foundations of our Western civilisation, and I shift the focus to question, reinterpret and pinpoint contemporary issues.



↑ **8** Vacuum Memory, vacuum-formed plaster sculpture, 20 x 15 x 7 cm (each work), 2023



↑ **9** Kôm Ombo, plaster sculpture,
150 x 150 x 240 cm, 2025

Of all the issues currently stirring up our societies, which ones are most relevant to your approach today? How do you address them without resorting to militancy, while maintaining subtlety and aesthetic standards?

For the moment, I am approaching these themes from quite a distance, which allows me to avoid falling into tragic formulations. I have a fairly theoretical approach that gives me the opportunity to pinpoint them while still maintaining a certain distance. I therefore prefer to focus on issues such as memory, disappearance, conservation and archiving, for example. These are latent themes in my practice.

In the near future, I would like to explore topics that I have already begun working on, such as trafficking in works of art and art objects. I would like to explore the question of illusion. This resonates particularly with current issues surrounding fake news, the loss of trust in the information available to us, and correlates directly with the role of moulding, the practice of forgery, and the creation of false, hollow cultures without substance.

Thanks to my training in decorative painting, I know how to paint faux skies and faux materials, and I would like to exploit this in terms of empty shells and the interplay between front and back in new pieces to come.

What do the myths that have been passed down to us for centuries mean to you? Should we reinterpret them, re-examine them in the light of our current societies, or leave them to history, to the past?

For my part, I believe that these stories serve as our shared imagination, sources of collective inspiration, and cultural links between different societies. Many authors and artists have drawn on Greek and Roman mythology to build bridges between their works and the founding texts of our Western society. But I consistently feel that they have offered a reinterpretation of these stories, reworking them in light of what artists were experiencing at the time. These are not outdated writings; they serve to help us view our contemporary world from certain angles and enable us to shed light on it thanks to this rich heritage.

I recently read Circe (2019) and The Song of Achilles (2020) by Madeline Miller. I discovered that Circe, a secondary character in the Odyssey, ultimately becomes extremely interesting in relation to current events, through her journey as a woman, the philosophical reflections that this raises, etc. It is very inspiring.

This back-and-forth process helps shed light on elements that may be relatively unknown, yet reveal a great deal, opening up new avenues for understanding societies.

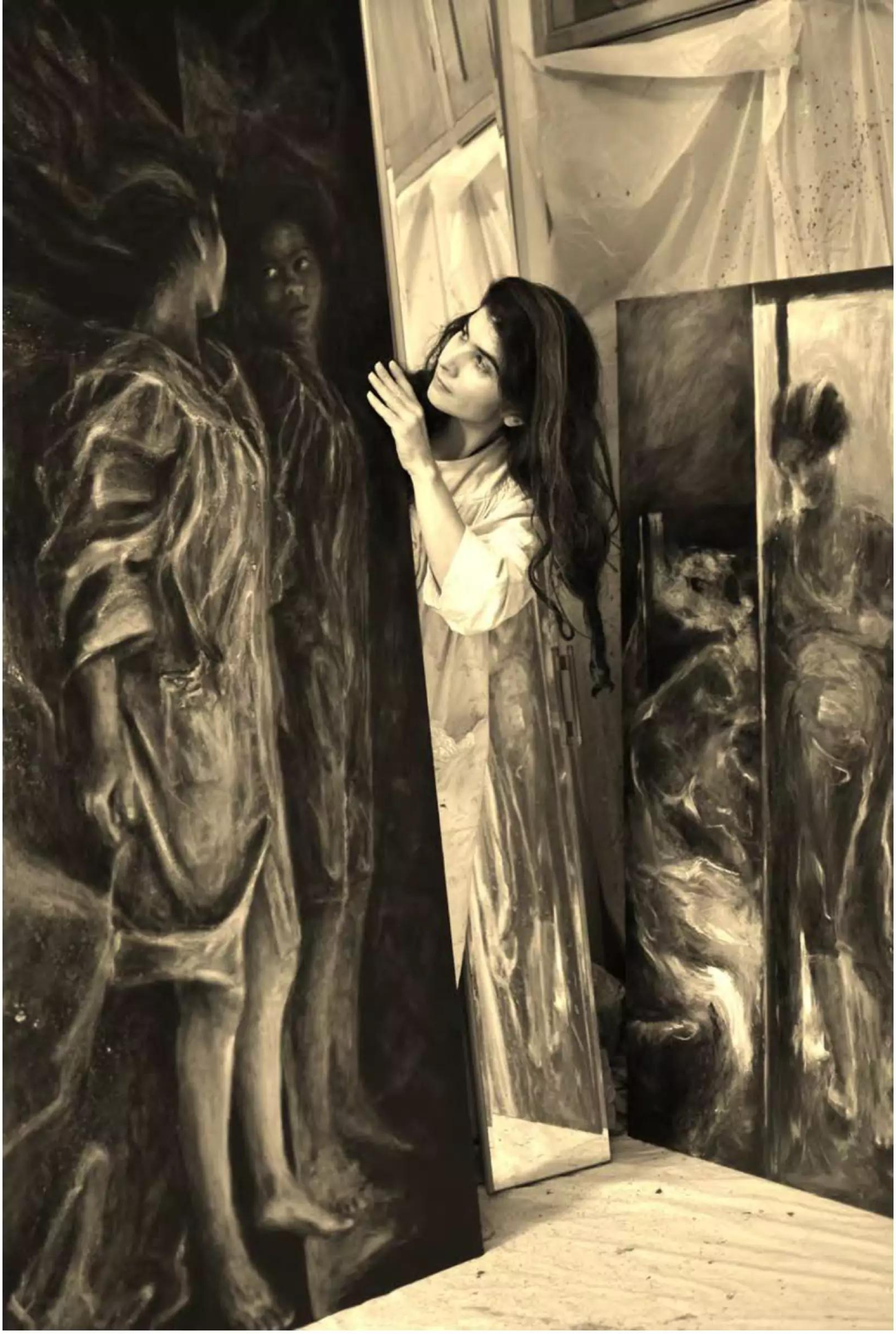
Nagham Hodaifa

Adeline Bailleux Benabdallah

Born in 1981 in Sweida (Syria), Nagham Hodaifa is a painter and art historian. Trained at the Damascus Academy of Fine Arts, she moved to France in 2005 and pursued a doctorate at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, which she devoted to the painter Marwan. His thesis, published in 2018 under the title Marwan, face à face, explores the theme of the face and intimacy, which also permeates his own pictorial work.

Her painting evolves from the face to fragments of the body – feet, hands, gloves, mirrors – between Veils, draperies and landscapes, where family transmission and collective memory intersect. Between sensual gestures and symbolic forms, she questions the human condition, exile, femininity and mourning.

Favouring interdisciplinary collaborations, she works with dancers, musicians, poets and video artists, as in Les Atours de la nuit or Mirage... Sarâb (2019, IMA). She exhibits regularly in Paris and around the world, while continuing her research on art in the Arab world. She has also published a book on the Moroccan painter Farid Belkahia.



↑ **10** Nagham in her studio, Paris, 2024,
left: La Traversée, mixed media on canvas, 114 x 195 cm, 2023–2024
right: Plénitude, mixed media on canvas, 146 x 89 cm, 2023

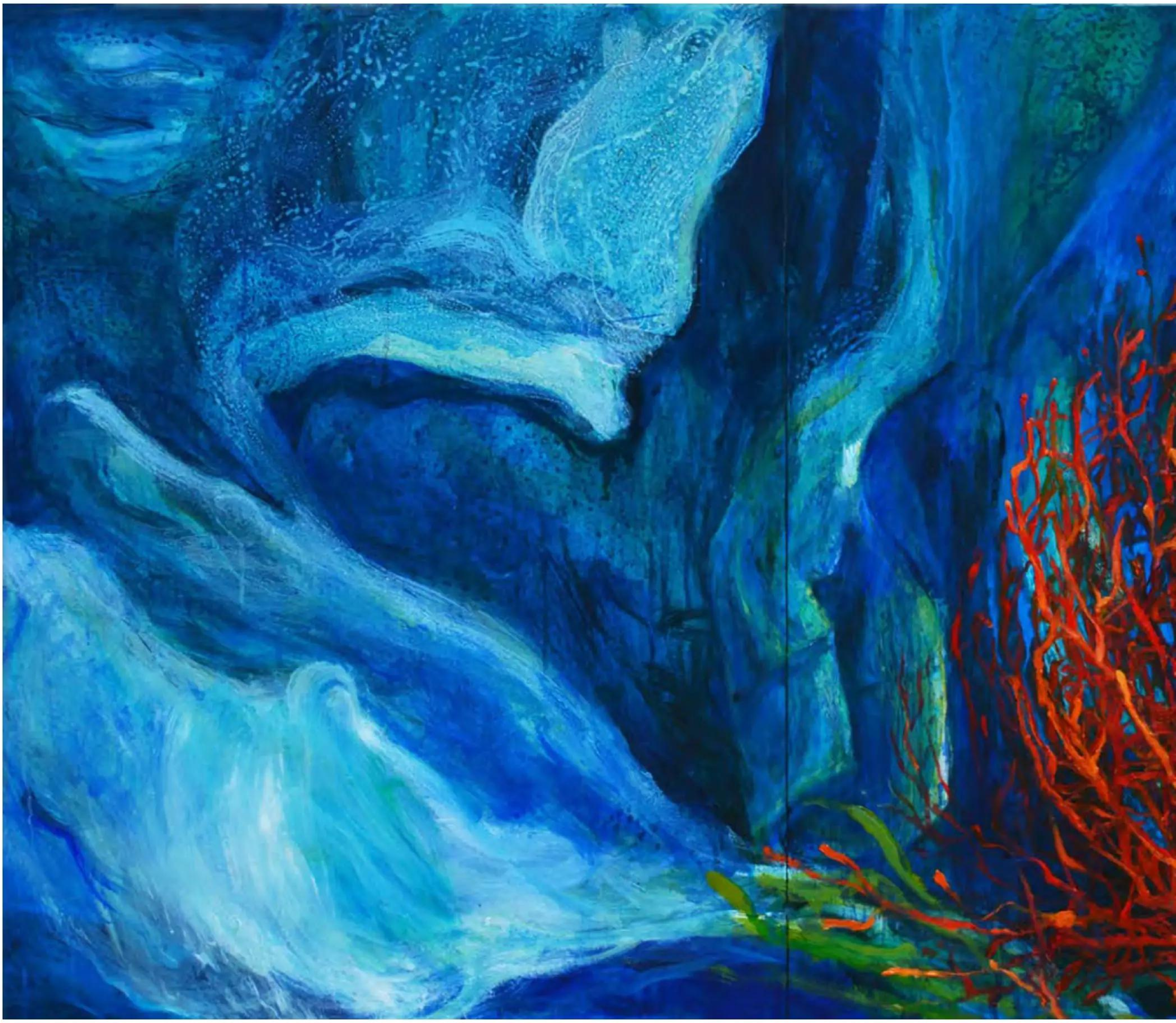
You have had a unique career path between Syria and France, between painting and research. What led you led you to choose this dual path?

After completing my studies at the Damascus Academy of Fine Arts, I was awarded a scholarship to study abroad. I had several destinations to choose from: France, Italy, Russia, Malaysia and Egypt. I chose France. One of the main reasons for this choice was my desire to discover, in real life, the works that I had previously only seen in books.

In Syria, visual culture related to painting is mainly confined to books: to see the great masters, you have to travel. France, with its wealth of museums, seemed like the obvious choice to me.

The scholarship was for a master's degree in art history, which matched my intellectual curiosity. Unlike other programmes, which focused on restoration, this one offered a space for theoretical reflection. I then went on to do a PhD in art history, while continuing to paint and work various jobs on the side.

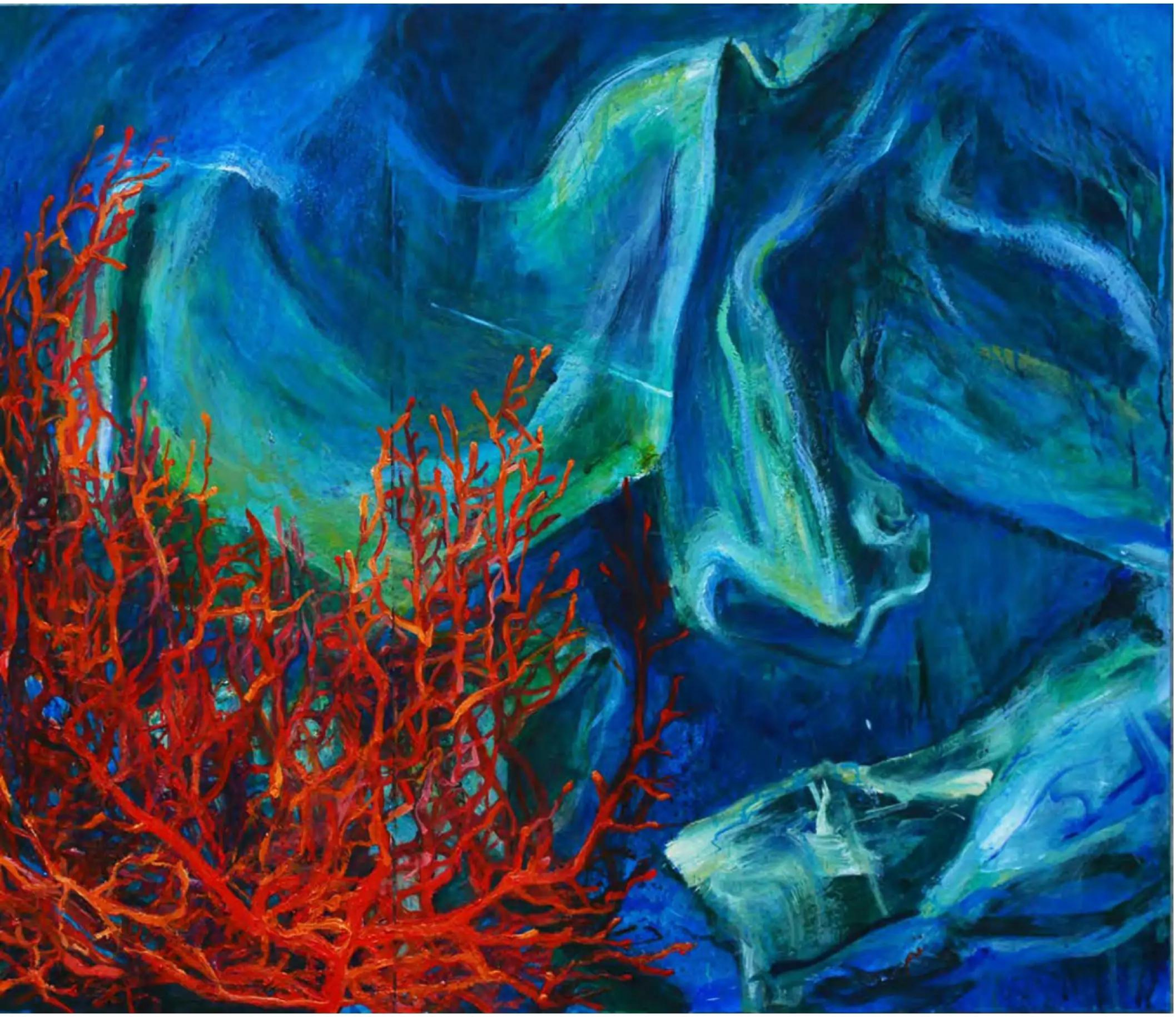
To be honest, I wasn't particularly drawn to theoretical studies at first. It was even a kind of personal challenge: why get involved in research?



academic when I defined myself first and foremost as a painter? This question accompanied me throughout my academic career.

Looking back, I have no regrets – quite the contrary. My commitment to research allowed me to explore subjects in depth that now feed into my artistic practice. Despite the many years I devoted to my studies, I never stopped painting.

↓ **11** Requiem, mixed media on wood, triptych, 65 x 150 cm, 2021



You work extensively with other artists – dancers, musicians, poets… What do these collaborations bring to your painting and performances?

These collaborations offer me a different kind of stimulation from the usually solitary activity of painting. They generate a collective, lively and multifaceted energy that opens up new dimensions in my work. Dialogue – particularly with musicians and the audience – profoundly transforms the relationship with the body in action and the pictorial gesture. It is no longer simply a matter of producing an image, but of sharing an experience.

These creations, whether performances or live shows, often constitute transitional stages in my artistic process. For example, in Les Atours de la nuit (2019) and Empreinte mon accent (2010), the works created during the performance were subsequently taken back to the studio and reworked, sometimes over several months or even years, to become finished canvases. This is the case with Chemise de nuit II (2013), which originated from a performance in which the audience was invited to leave their fingerprints on the canvas, interacting with opera singing, piano and dance…

Collaborations with poets, but also with researchers, allow me to explore other territories and to design installations where painting interacts with other media.

In all these collective experiences, painting remains for me both the starting point… and the end goal.

The figure of your grandmother and her nightdress often appear in your works. What does this image represent for you?

The nightdress motif appeared in my work about ten years ago, inspired by an intimate memory: that of a garment given to me by my grandmother – a gesture imbued with a sense of both femininity and family. It was one of the items I packed in my suitcase when I left for France in 2005.

This garment has become a veritable leitmotif. Born from a personal memory, it tends to take on a universal significance, capable of questioning our human condition. Its transparency, lightness and proximity to the skin open up a multitude of interpretations – philosophical, moral, social and anthropological.

Dressing oneself is both a means of protecting the body and preparing it for the gaze of others. The nightdress, a garment of intimacy, can

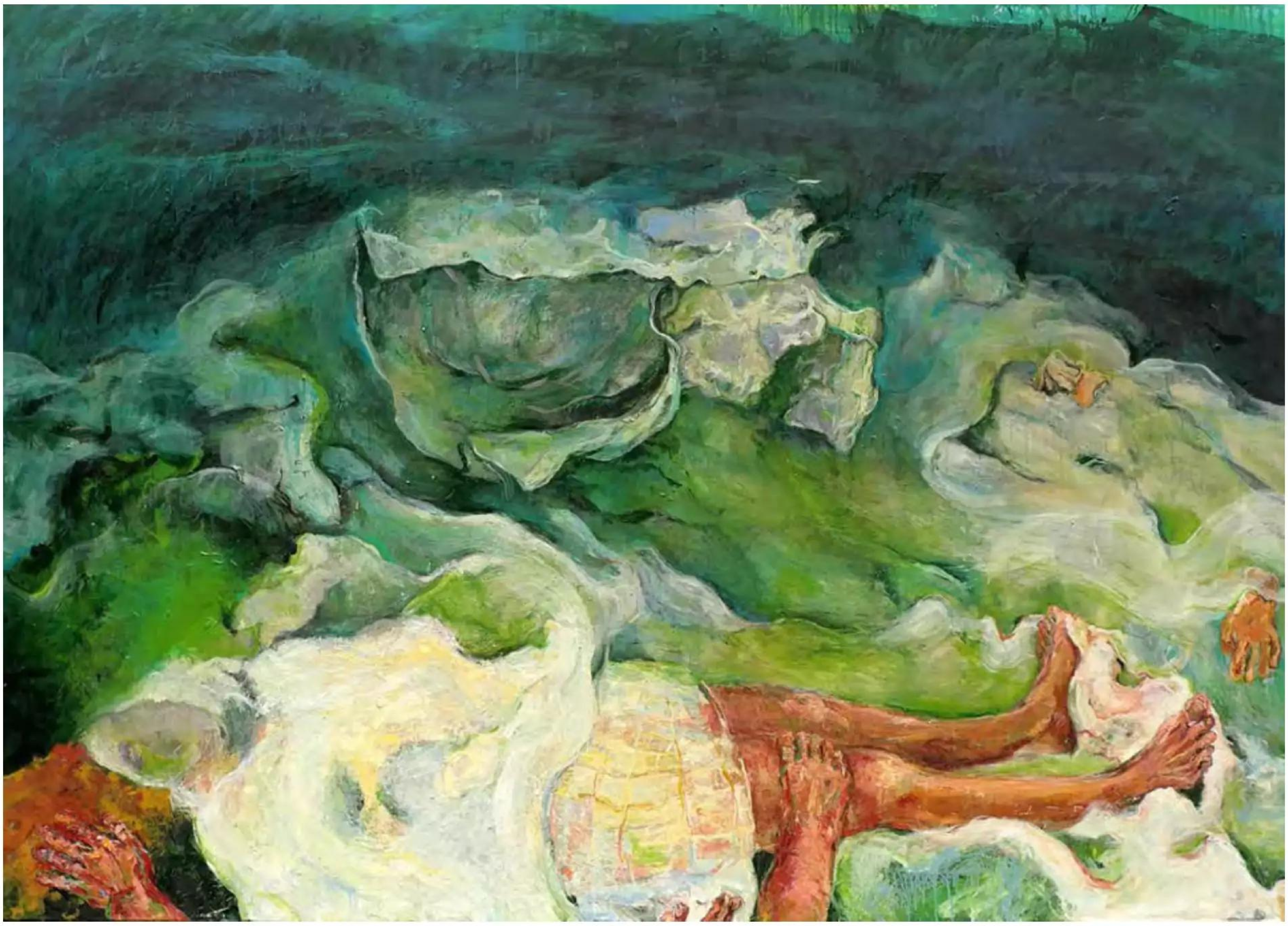
← **12** Les Atours de la nuit**,**
mixed media on Arches paper, tondo diameter 3.39 m, performance with percussionist Youssef Hbeisch and clarinettist and flautist Mohamed Najem, 2019

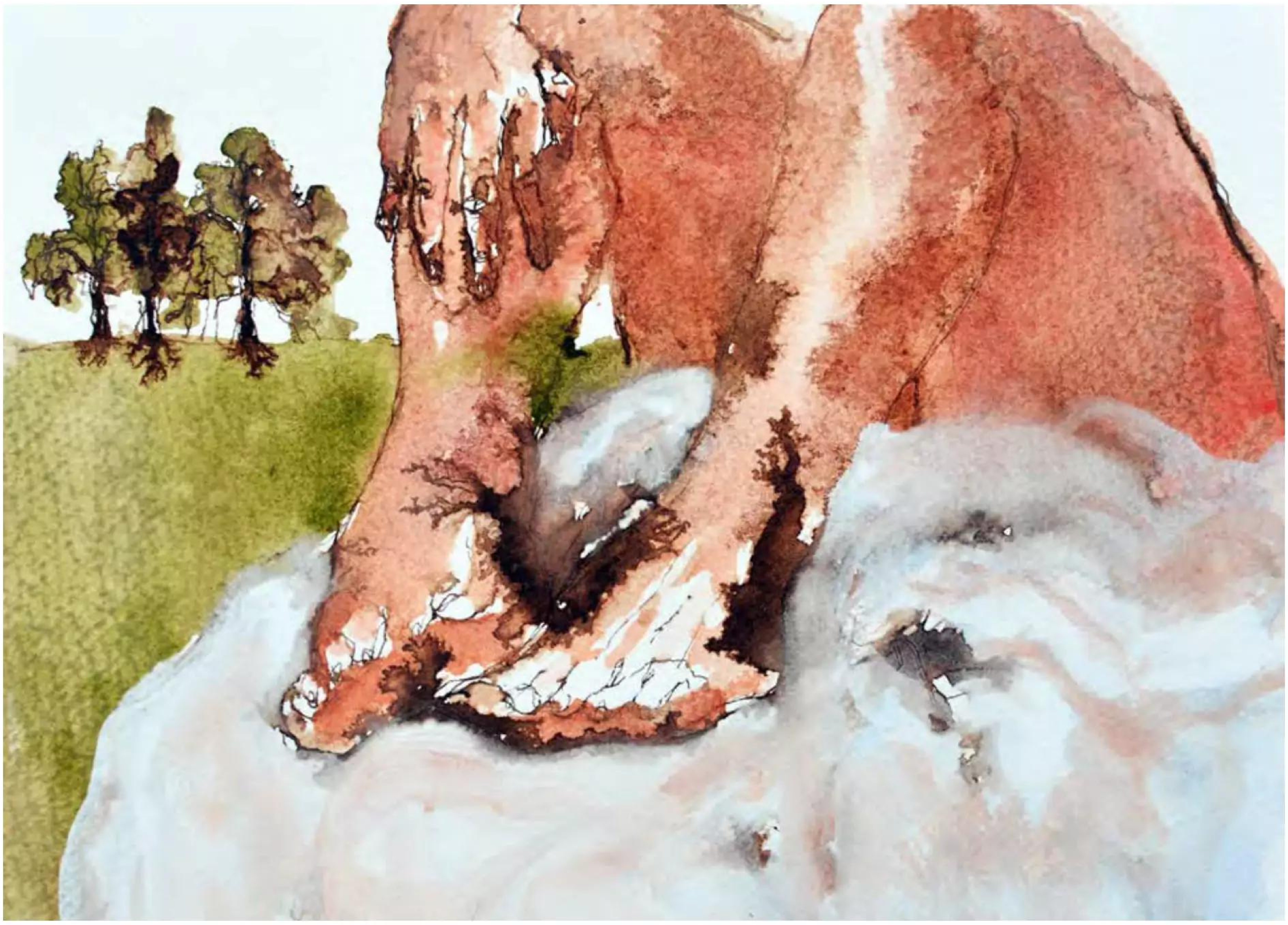
be charged with eroticism or modesty. Wearing it, especially when it belonged to another woman – grandmother, mother or daughter – means immersing oneself in a memory, a breath, a story. It becomes an inhabited object, carrying an emotional bond, a sensitive, almost carnal trace.

This act of transmission – preserving, prolonging, remembering – takes on its full meaning in my pictorial practice. It allows me to question what is visible and what remains veiled. For this veil of night is only visible in intimacy, or through a mirror: the gaze becomes clouded in order to better reveal what is hidden.

The nightdress thus becomes a metaphor: for drapery, desire, skin, the threshold between presence and absence. It questions our relationship with the body, modesty, sleep – that fragile moment between two states.
Investing in painting means opening up a field of symbolic resonances that is constantly evolving. Because for me, painting is not something that is thought out in advance: it is constructed through the act of painting.

↓ **13** Nightdress II, mixed media on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 2010–2013





↑ **14** Mother Earth, watercolour, walnut stain and ink on paper, 18 x 22.8 cm, 2015

The body is central to your work: first the face, then the hands, the feet, dance... How has this relationship with the body evolved over the course of your career?

It is a slow process, which has developed gradually over the years. It all began with my large-format, oblong polyptychs, situated on the border between figuration and abstraction. This type of composition has accompanied me since my final project at the Damascus Academy of Fine Arts in 2003, through to my first works created in France in 2006.

In these polyptychs, movement arises from the colour itself. This visual dynamic naturally led me to invite dancers and musicians to interact with my paintings: to improvise, to engage in dialogue, to physically enter the pictorial space. I thus imagined a staging of painting in motion, even if it meant altering it. For me, it was a question of exhibiting differently, by rethinking uses, formats and materials.

This journey gave rise to several multidisciplinary performances, such as Laqlaq l'atelier, Le héron qui fit danser les peintures (2009) and Tympan (2010). During this period, I did a lot of sketching from life with dancers, which led me to reinvent my approach to the body and seek out a new aesthetic.

At the same time, in 2008, I began doctoral research focused on the face – a theoretical reflection that profoundly enriched my view of the image.

Works related to dance – where the body tends towards an almost animalistic state, in direct connection with nature – then inspired other creations focused on the human condition, through the representation of the body. Often anonymous, naked or draped, whole or fragmented, the body sometimes transforms into a landscape, a cartography of the intimate. I then began to represent bodies without faces or heads, focusing on the extremities: hands, feet...

Until 2023, when I launched a new series based around mirrors, "Matières spéculaires" (Specular Materials), in which the body reappears in its entirety.

At the beginning of the war in Syria, you chose not to show certain works to prevent them from being reduced to a political interpretation. Is this rejection of pathos or direct violence a way of protecting your art?

Yes, it was both a way of protecting my art… and protecting myself as a human being. When a tragic event strikes a country, the reception of works tends to become polarised: artists are expected to take a stand, to react, to transform collective pain into discourse. The way the work is viewed then becomes essentially political or emotional, sometimes to the detriment of its complexity.

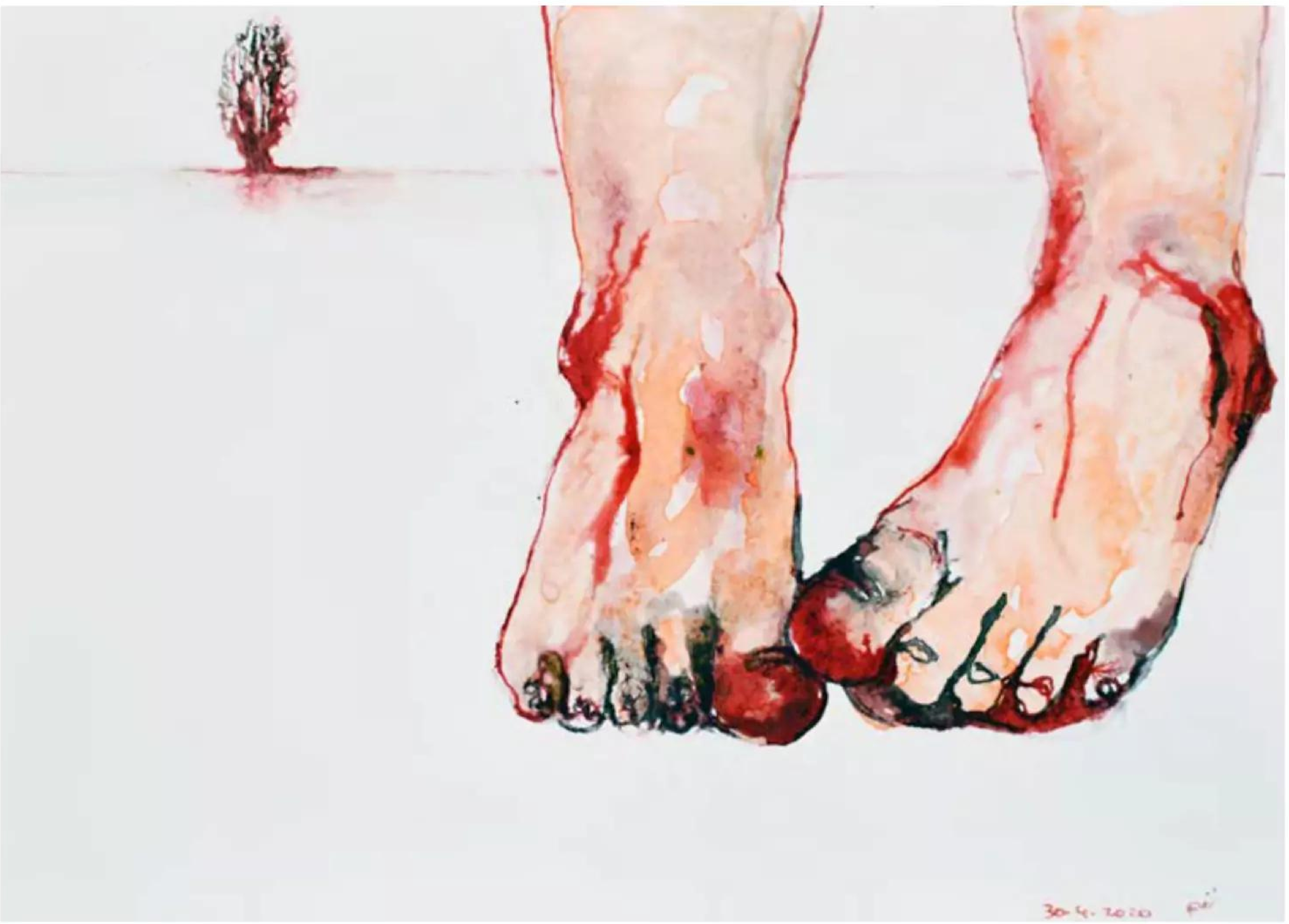
Faced with the disturbing images coming out of Syria, I felt a sense of guilt about continuing to exhibit my paintings, as if I were unwittingly capitalising on current events. For me, this posed a real moral dilemma.

So I decided to take a step back. I followed events from a distance, but deliberately avoided the most violent images. Many were circulating on social media, then reproduced in films or publications, showing scenes that were unbearable to watch. These images raise an ethical problem: they raise questions about human dignity – that of the people filmed, whose images are often broadcast without their consent, and that of the viewer, who is confronted with violence they did not choose to see.

This leads to a vicious circle: violence begets violence, and consuming it, even passively, ultimately changes us.

That is why I decided to protect myself – so that I could continue to create in a different way, without giving in to this logic of shock and astonishment. During this period, I also continued my doctoral research, which I defended in 2015. Seeing it through to the end was, in itself, a form of resistance. Rejecting overt violence is not running away from reality: it is seeking another way to reflect it.

↓ **15** Lonely, mixed media on Arches paper, 14.8 x 21 cm, 2020



16 La Dame des laves, oil and pigments on canvas, 162 x 114 cm, Oct.-Nov. 2023 ->

In 2015-2016, you begin working on the legs, after seeing The Birth of Venus. Is this a way of invoking ancient myths in your painting?

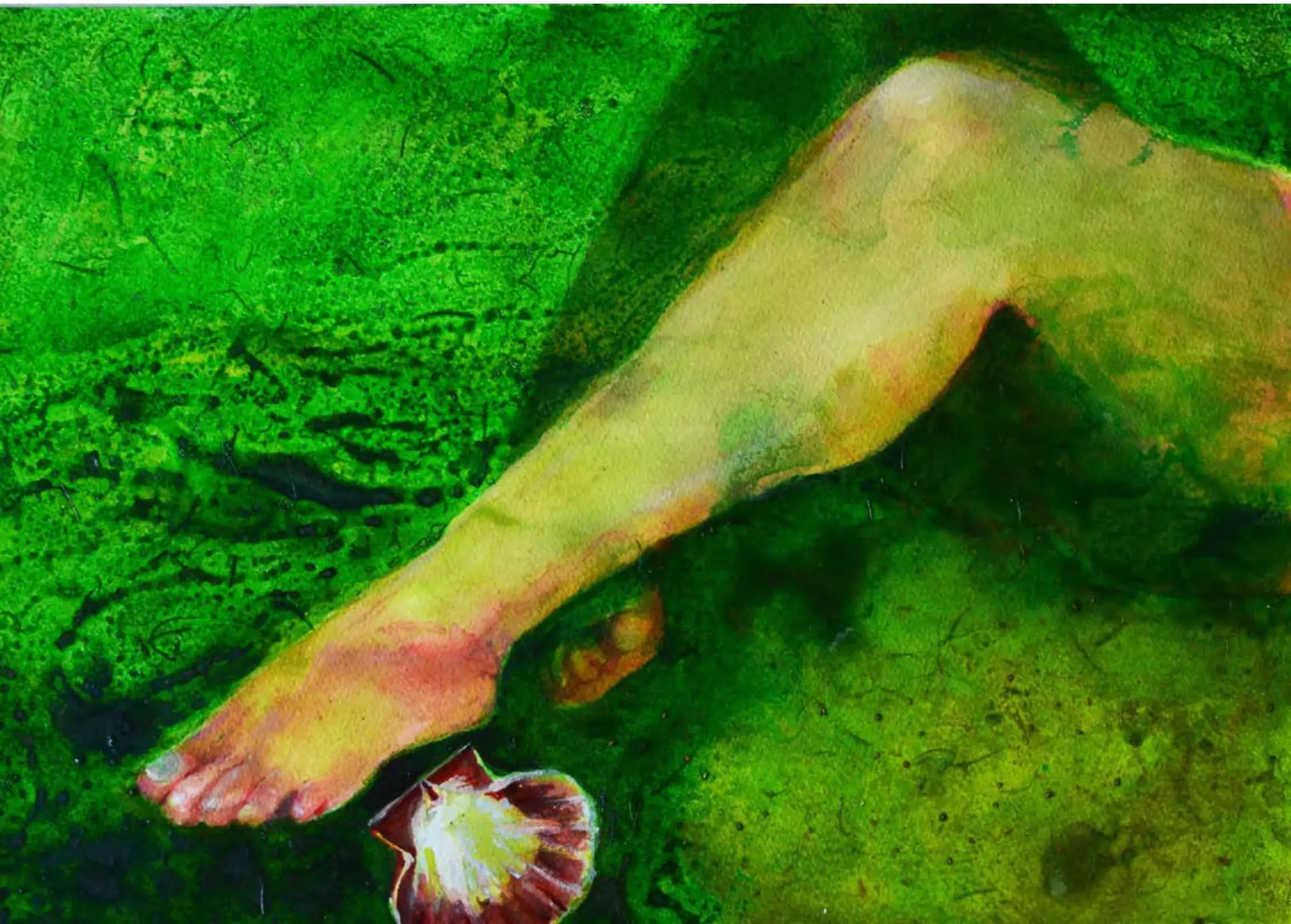
In reality, these body fragments appeared in my work well before 2015. But from 2015–2016 onwards, they took on a more central role, particularly in works where the body blends into the landscape. We see legs anchored in the earth, sometimes distant, sometimes partially concealed under a drape. In the background, sketched trees draw a direct link with nature. It is a way for me to return to a form of original nature—a return to Mother Earth, to the idea of birth. The body then becomes a body-landscape, a fragment of myth in itself.

In 2021, during the exhibition "Body and Soul: From Donatello to Michelangelo" at the Louvre Museum, I was deeply moved by a small sculpture attributed to Antonio Lombardo: Venus Anadyomene. I spent a long time in front of it, moved by its delicacy, while memories of the many variations on The Birth of Venus came flooding back.

It was in this context that I began a series of drawings on paper – never before shown – depicting two legs associated with a scallop shell: a classic symbol of Venus, but also of purity, travel, passage and metamorphosis.

My aim is not to directly quote ancient myths, but rather to reactivate them – to let them surface through a contemporary, silent, physical reading. These legs, isolated or fragmented, become the vestiges of a universal narrative, suspended between personal memory, iconographic tradition and the collective imagination of art history.

↓ **17** Venus Anadyomene II (after Antonio Lombardo), mixed media on Arches paper, 36 x 50.7 cm, 2022



Your works sometimes seem to be permeated by almost mythological narratives, between pain, rebirth and memory. Are you inspired by certain stories, ancient or modern?

In my work, I seek to create images that resonate like personal myths: rooted in lived experience, yet conveying a universal language. These images may arise from an event, an emotion, current affairs, or even certain readings – such as those of Gaston Bachelard, who explores elemental forces, the imagination of matter, the home, fire...

A work such as La Dame des laves (2023), for example, is not inspired by a specific story, but invokes powerful archetypes: the guardian, the survivor, the one who stands tall in the midst of the fire. She is both witness and silent angel. She watches the world burn – not with pathos, but with an incandescent, almost sacred calm.

This painting engages with contemporary violence – it was created at a time of great intensity, resonating with what is happening in Gaza – but it also draws on something older, more mythical and archaic. Fire, lava and mirrors are elements that run through collective narratives and intimate tensions. They speak to the human condition.

I believe that art can reactivate forgotten stories, or bring new ones to light – not to explain the world, but to offer open forms in which everyone can project their own memories, myths and wounds. It is a way of transforming experience, of making it shareable, without impoverishing it.

Do you think art can create new personal or collective mythologies in the face of contemporary tragedies such as war or exile?

Yes, I believe that art can give rise to new mythologies – not in the sense of fixed narratives, but as symbolic forms capable of giving meaning to what would otherwise remain unspeakable. When faced with violent experiences such as war, exile, loss or uprooting, dominant narratives often fail to convey the intimate, the lived experience. Art then becomes a space where fragments of experience can be transformed into sensitive, symbolic images, sometimes silent, but always imbued with memory.

By avoiding direct language, art opens up other levels of interpretation: sensory, emotional, poetic. It allows personal experiences to be transformed into shareable stories, without standardising or impoverishing them. It is not a question of imposing meaning, but of offering open forms in which everyone can project their own wounds, inner narratives and personal myths.

In this sense, art does not repair – but it connects. It weaves a possible space of resonance between beings.

Your 2023 self-portrait, inspired by Velázquez, also seems to refer to iconic artistic figures. Is this a way of placing yourself in a lineage, of connecting yourself to a tradition?

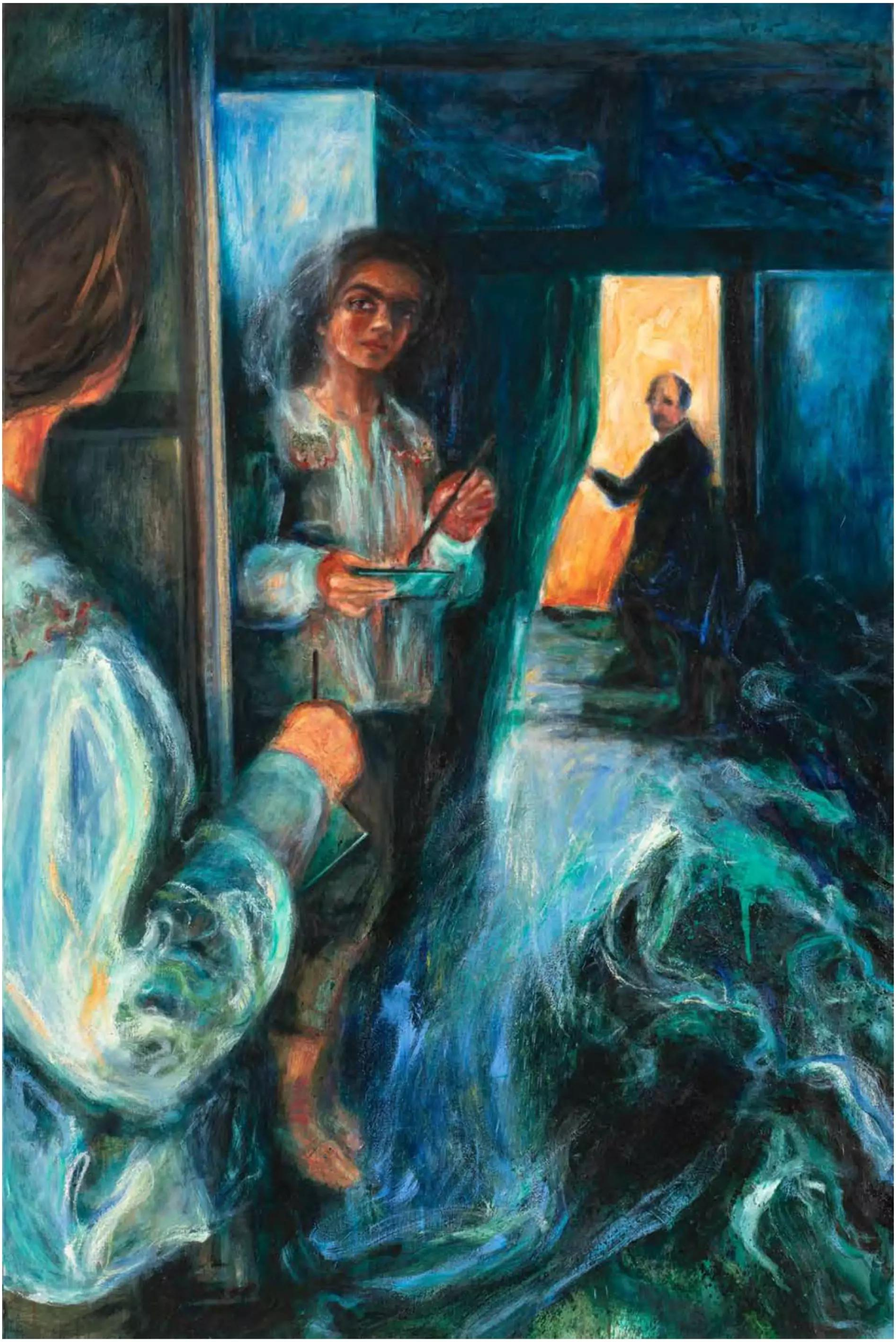
Self-Portrait. Allegory of Painting is a manifesto canvas. It is my only self-portrait as a painter, and it takes the form of a double homage: to Velázquez's Las Meninas, of course, but also to Artemisia Gentileschi, through the very title of the work. Beyond the quotation, it is a broader homage to an entire pictorial tradition—to the manner and material of studio painters.

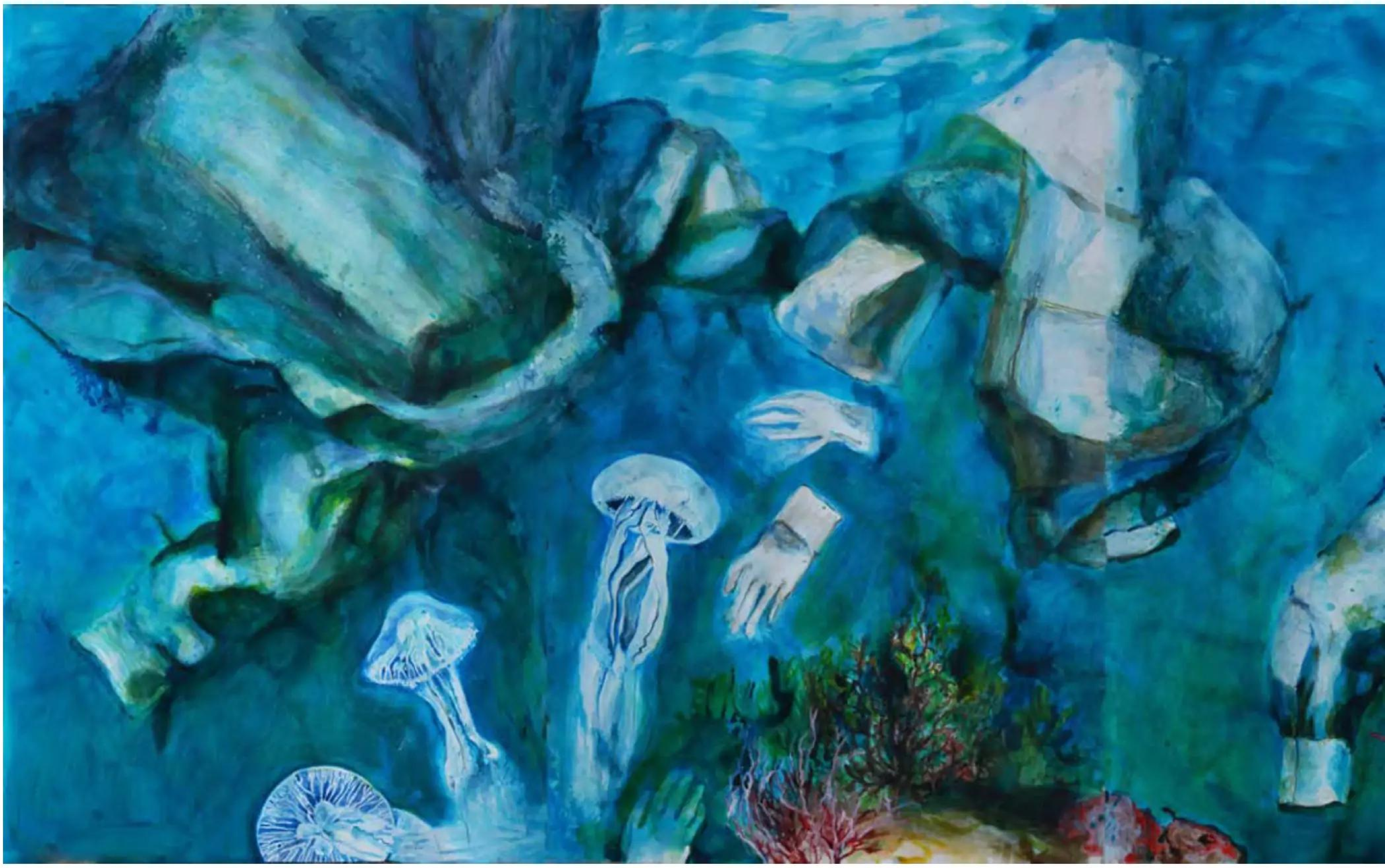
I advocate a return to traditional techniques: preparing colours, mixing pigments slowly and sensually, feeling the paste become colourful energy... then applying it to the canvas with gusto, in a direct, almost urgent manner. This painting is born from raw materials, from the slow and careful transformation of matter – a true alchemy of the craft. I consider this expertise to be essential to my practice.

The viewer is first confronted with the materiality of the painting. But beyond this physical presence, the canvas also becomes a cosa mentale—an embodied thought, both intellectual and sensual.

It is in this sense that I connect with tradition: not out of nostalgia, but out of necessity. Since Impressionism, part of the secret of the craft seems to have been lost. Renoir himself said: "To reach my age and not know how to mix oil and essence. " This shows how fundamental an intimate knowledge of the pictorial medium is. For all creation in painting is based first and foremost on it: to understand it and master it is to reveal its full expressive power.

-> **18** Self-portrait. Allegory of painting, mixed media on canvas, 146 x 97 cm, May–Oct. 2023





Since 2020, you have referred to the Mediterranean as a fragile area fraught with migratory tragedies. How did your "chest draperies" come about, in tribute to those who have died at sea?

The Mediterranean, End of All Hope project was born in 2020 during an artistic residency in Nice. Facing this seemingly peaceful sea, I could not forget its contemporary darkness – this sea turned into a graveyard, marked by thousands of lives lost. According to the International Organisation for Migration, more than 32,000 people have disappeared in the Mediterranean since 2014.

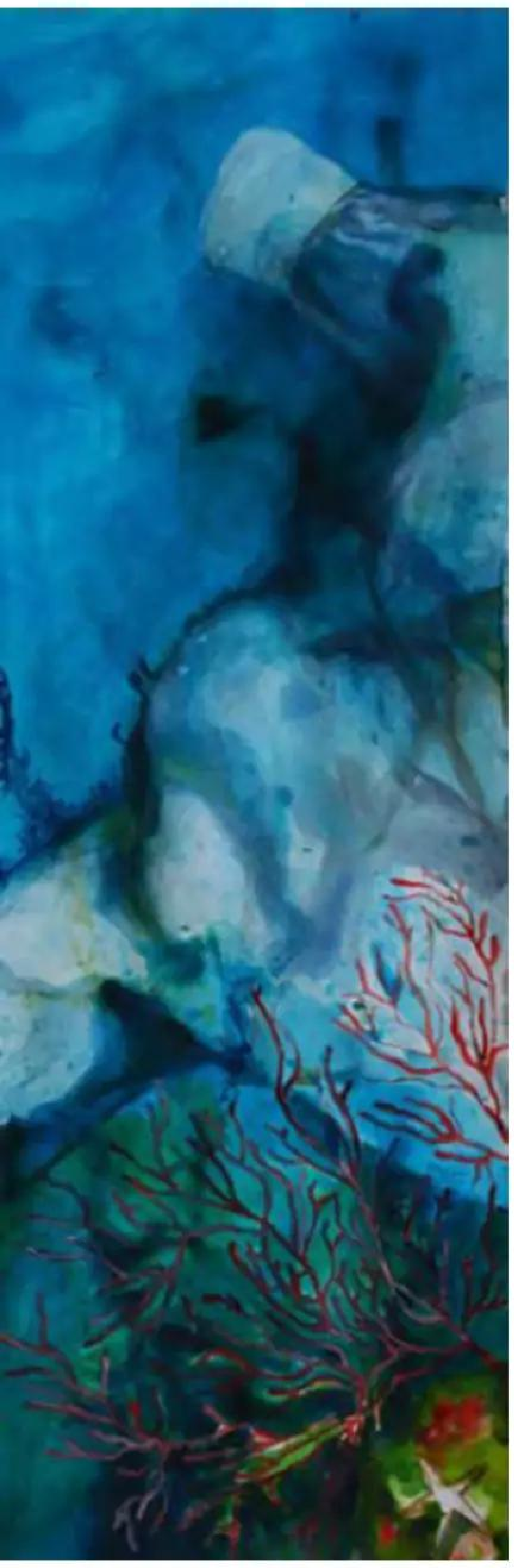
This project is a silent tribute to those who perished at sea, often without a trace – whether in the Mediterranean, the English Channel or, going further back in time, the Atlantic: the victims of 1929–1936 (Spain, United States), the exodus of 1940, the boat people... To every man, woman and child who lost their lives because of their displacement. For migration is not a contemporary anomaly: it is immemorial, it belongs to the deep history of humanity.

In this series, I wanted to create a suspended space. In the middle of a deep blue sky, there are no longer any bodies – only shirts, solitary gloves, floating draperies.

These shapes become "thoracic draperies", textile algae that prolong absence. The body has disappeared, but it remains in these fragments, in symbiosis with the sea. A way of embodying erasure, without reducing it to silence.

It is a question of dignity. Of giving meaning to our shared condition on earth, beyond borders.

An immigrant has committed no crime other than being born in a place he had to flee in search of a better life. Anyone could be in his place. We must face up to this tragedy, which unfortunately continues. Every civilisation is measured by the way it treats its dead.



← **19** Mediterranean Sea, mixed media on Arches paper, triptych, 102 x 198 cm, 2020

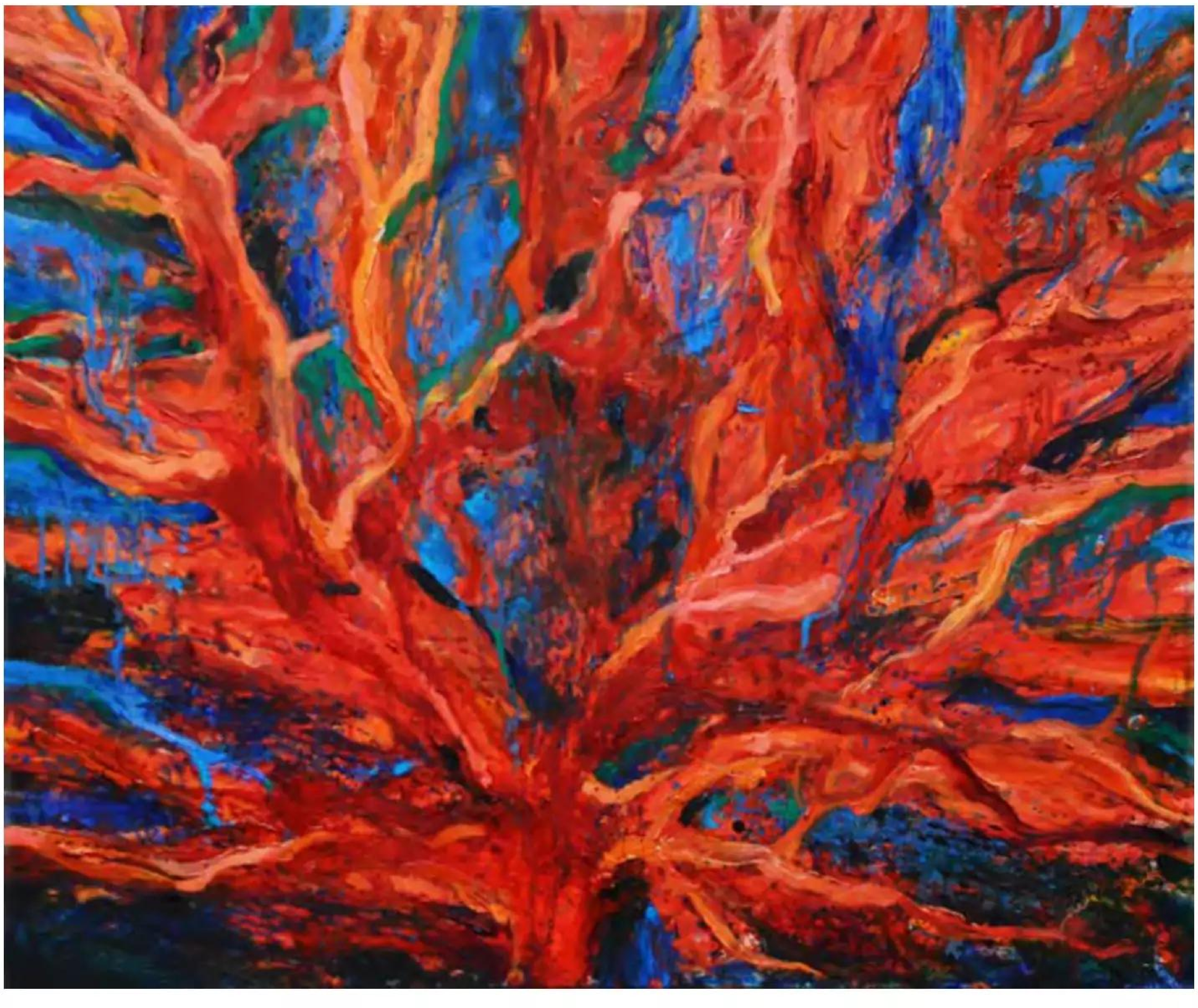
You have also worked around coral reefs, in connection with red, the sea, and the body. What is the symbolism of this marine universe in your work?

After working on flowing drapery in homage to those lost at sea, my work shifted towards marine life – its beauty, but also its fragility. Two figures then emerged: the jellyfish, with its gelatinous, translucent, almost textile texture, and red coral, both organic and mineral, powerful and allegorical. Both belong to the cnidarian phylum and, in my work, have become symbols of threatened life.

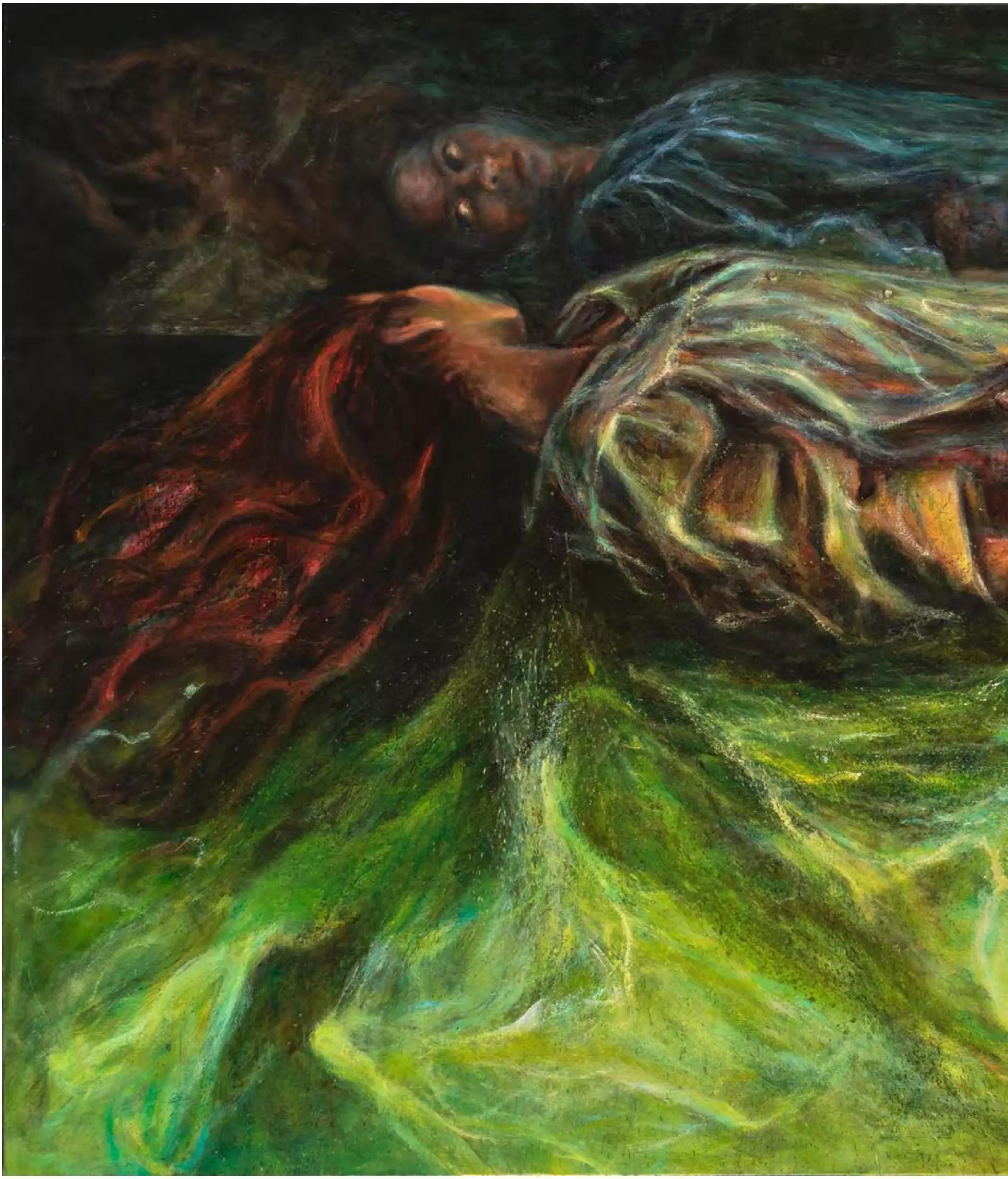
Coral bleaching and jellyfish proliferation are now visible signs of a profound disruption, an ongoing collapse of biodiversity. These so-called "engineer" organisms patiently build their skeletons over centuries. Their structure is strikingly beautiful and can be admired at all scales. Yet these fascinating creatures, essential to the balance of marine life, are gradually turning into bleached, devitalised fields – white as death.

This project also questions the artist's responsibility towards living beings. Art is not there to illustrate an observation, but to bring out a different sensitivity to the world. It becomes a subject for thinking about ecology, questioning our place, our impact, and our connection to living beings.

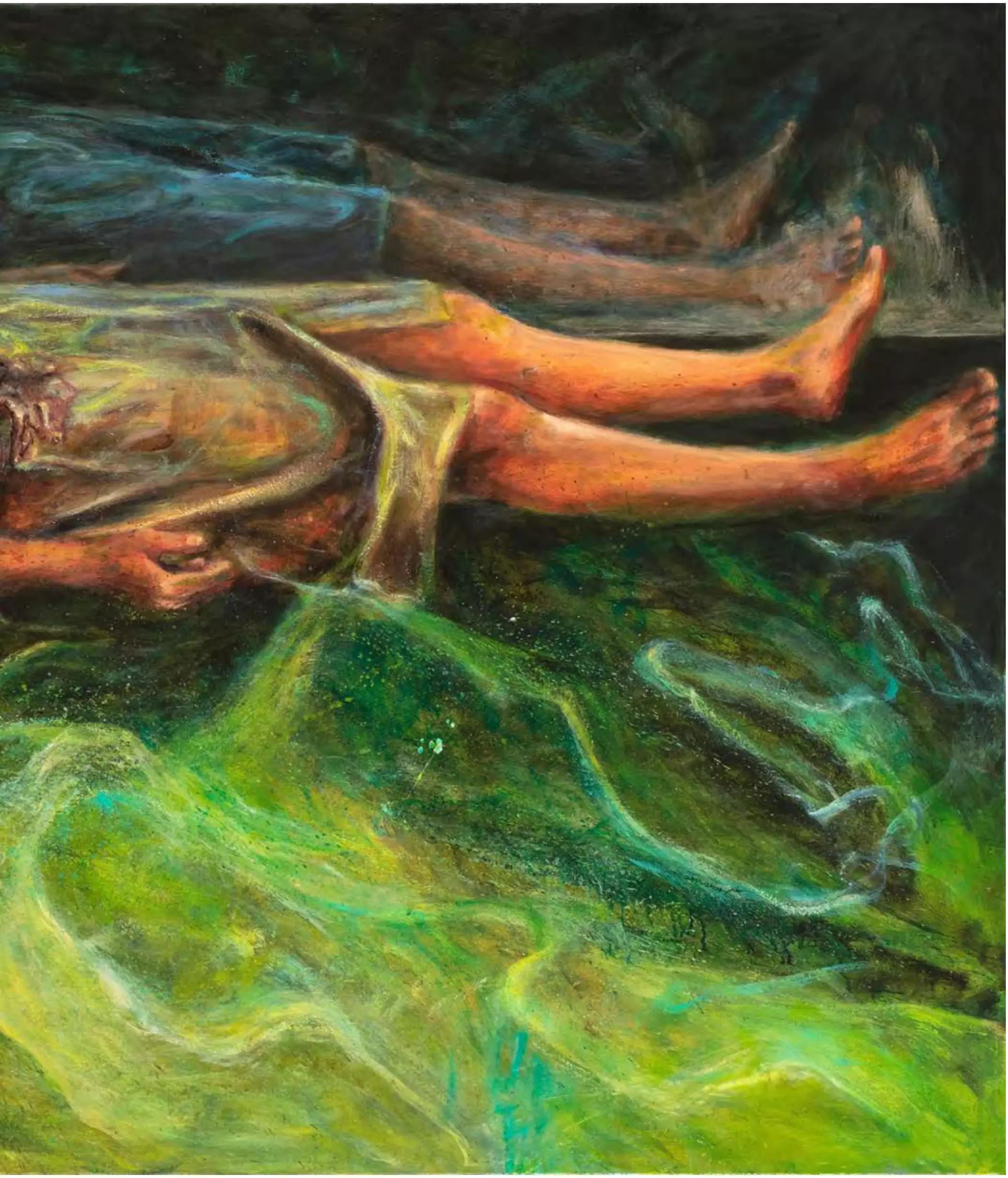
The challenge, ultimately, remains the same: preserving life.

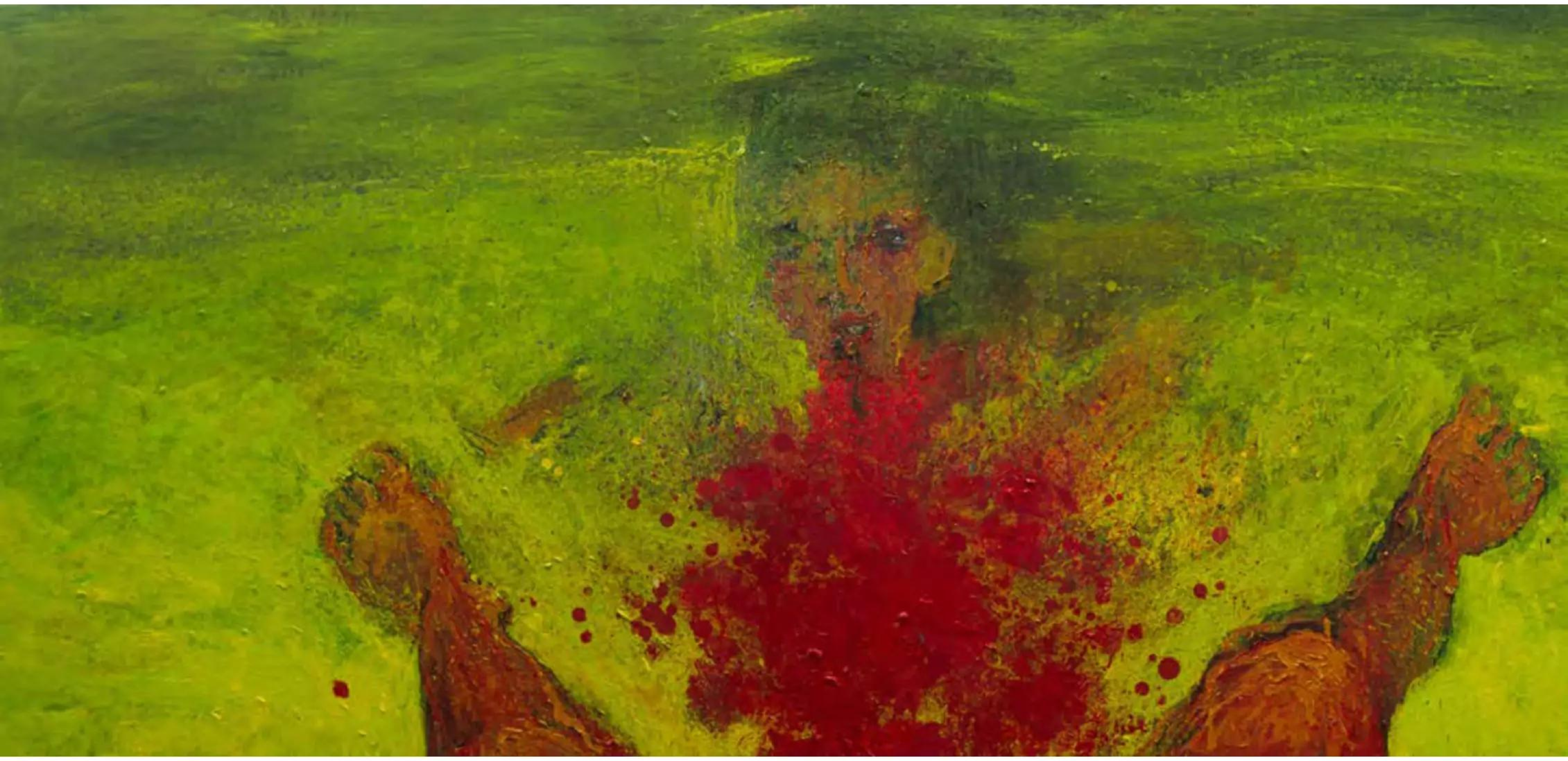


-> **20** Coral Reef, oil on wood, 54 x 65 cm, 2021–2022



↑ **21** La Traversée, mixed media on canvas, 195 x 114 cm, Nov.–Dec. 2023–Jan. 2024

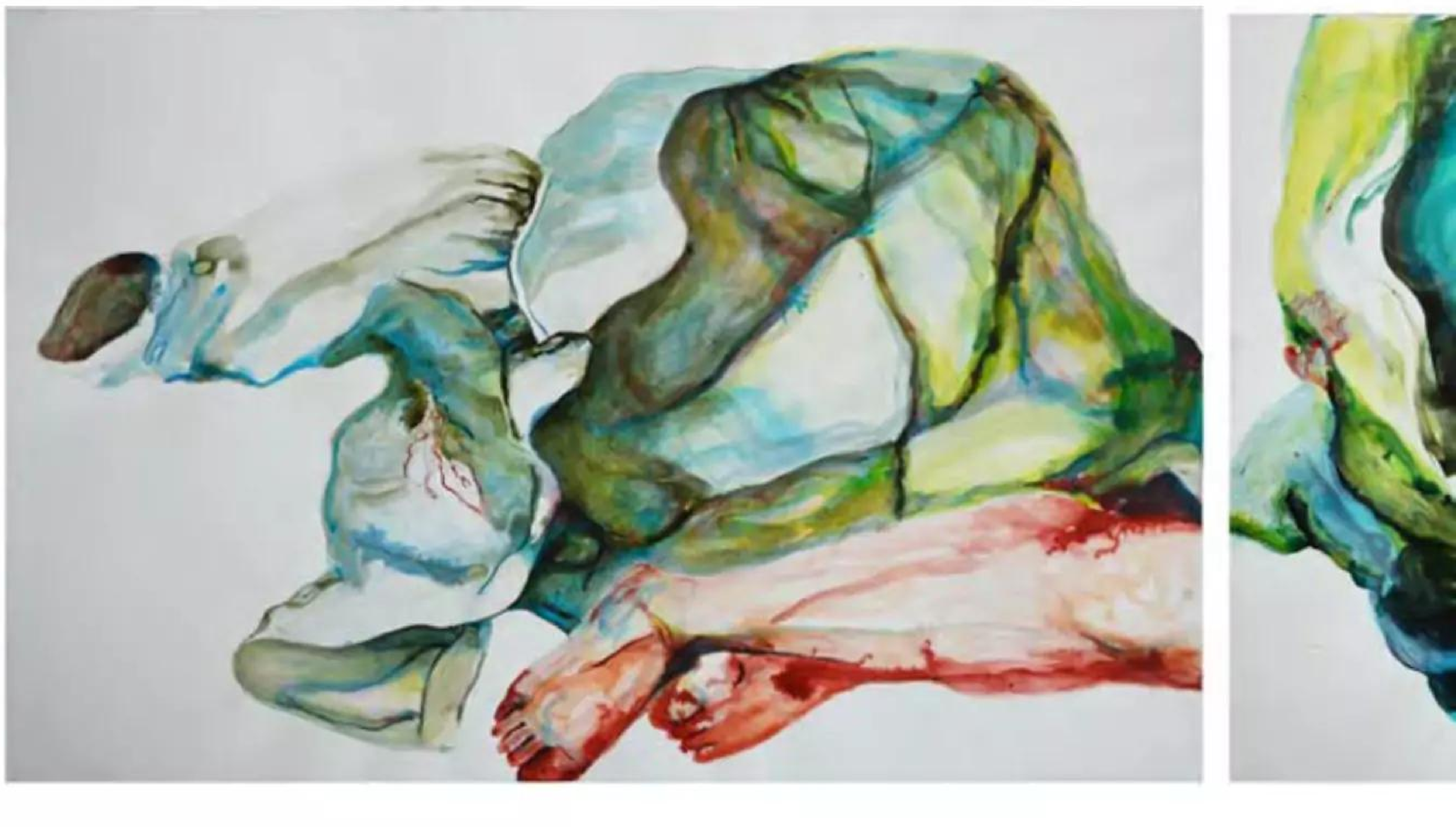




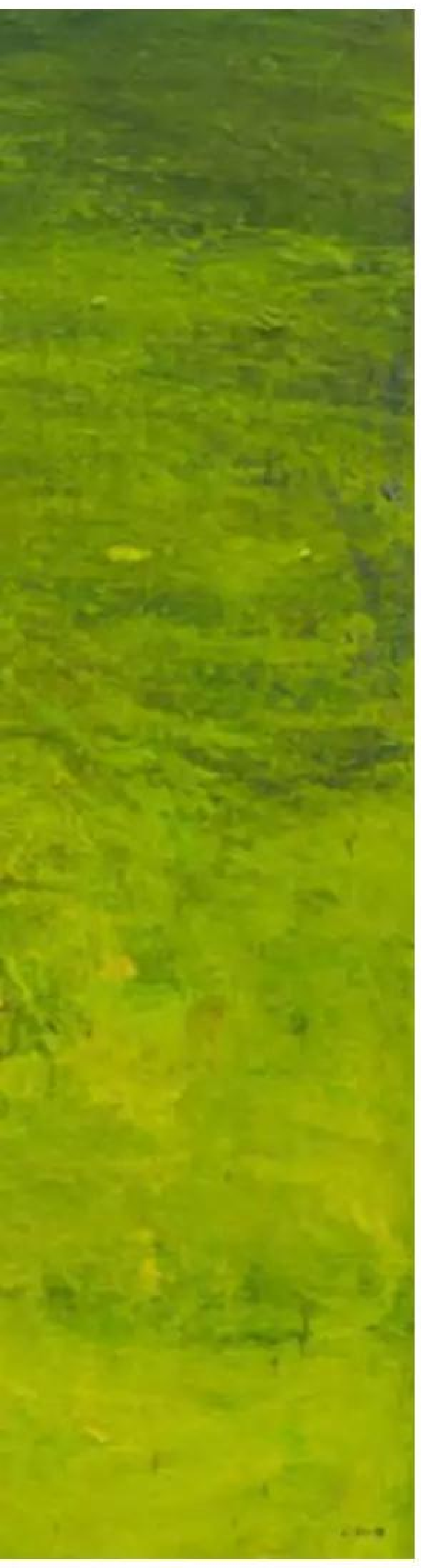
In Au-delà du seuil (2009), you explore the boundaries between inside and outside, birth, death, and honour killings. How important are collective memory and invisible wounds in your work?

In Beyond the Threshold, as in other works, I seek to bring out what cannot always be said. The painting, centred on the unique presence of two feet, blood and an inverted – or perhaps reflected – face, plunges the viewer into deliberate ambiguity. It is unclear whether it is a suspended head or a reflection in a mirror. This uncertainty reflects the deep turmoil caused by certain acts of violence – particularly those against women – which are often relegated to the shadows, silenced or forgotten.

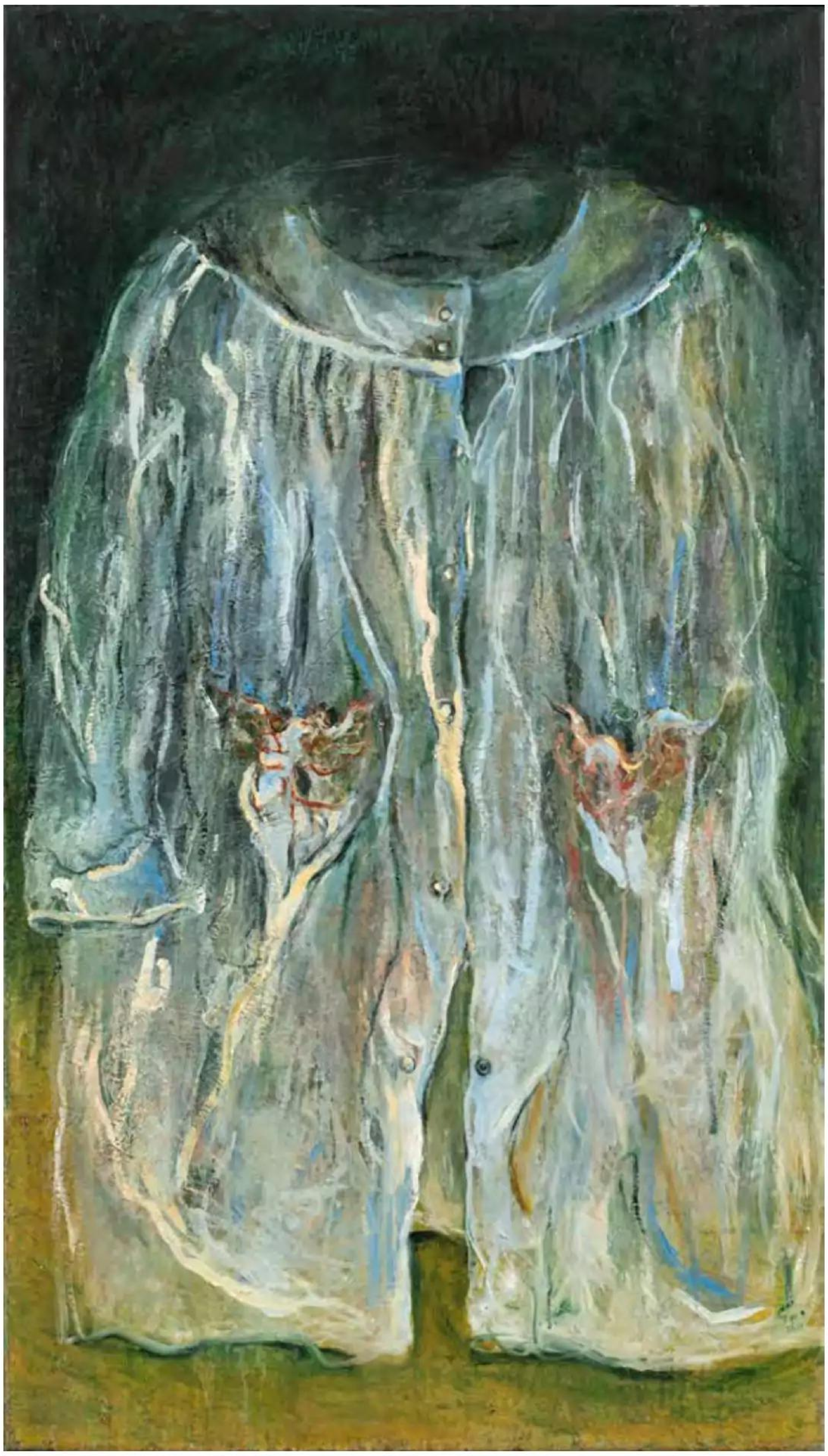
There is a tension between presence and absence, between the natural cycle of life and death, and the collective trauma that is transmitted underground. Collective memory passes through bodies, forms, silences. Even when it is not expressed, it is there – in constant friction with intimate memory.



24 Nightdress (Continued), mixed media on Arches paper, triptych, 66 x 306 cm, 2020 ->

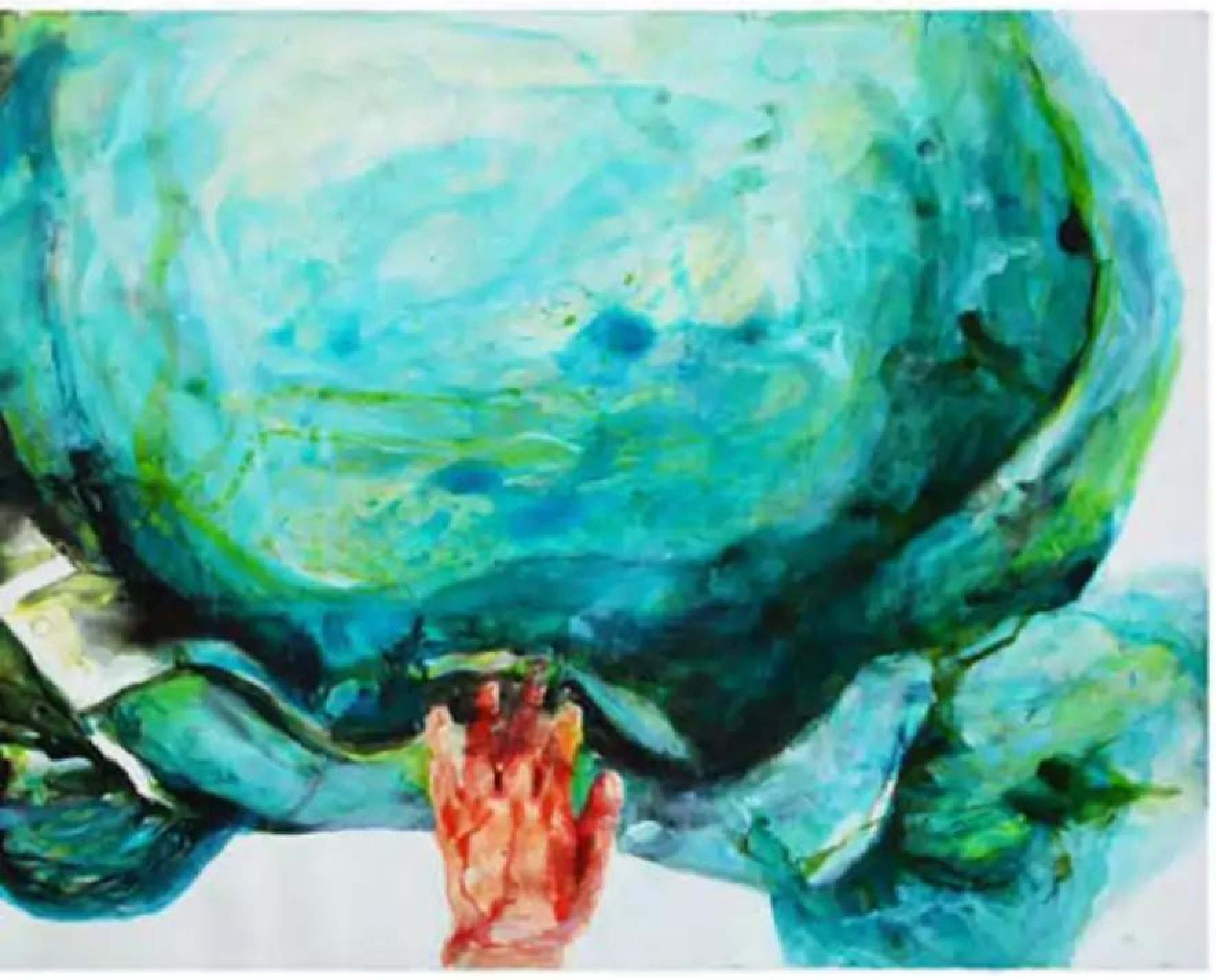


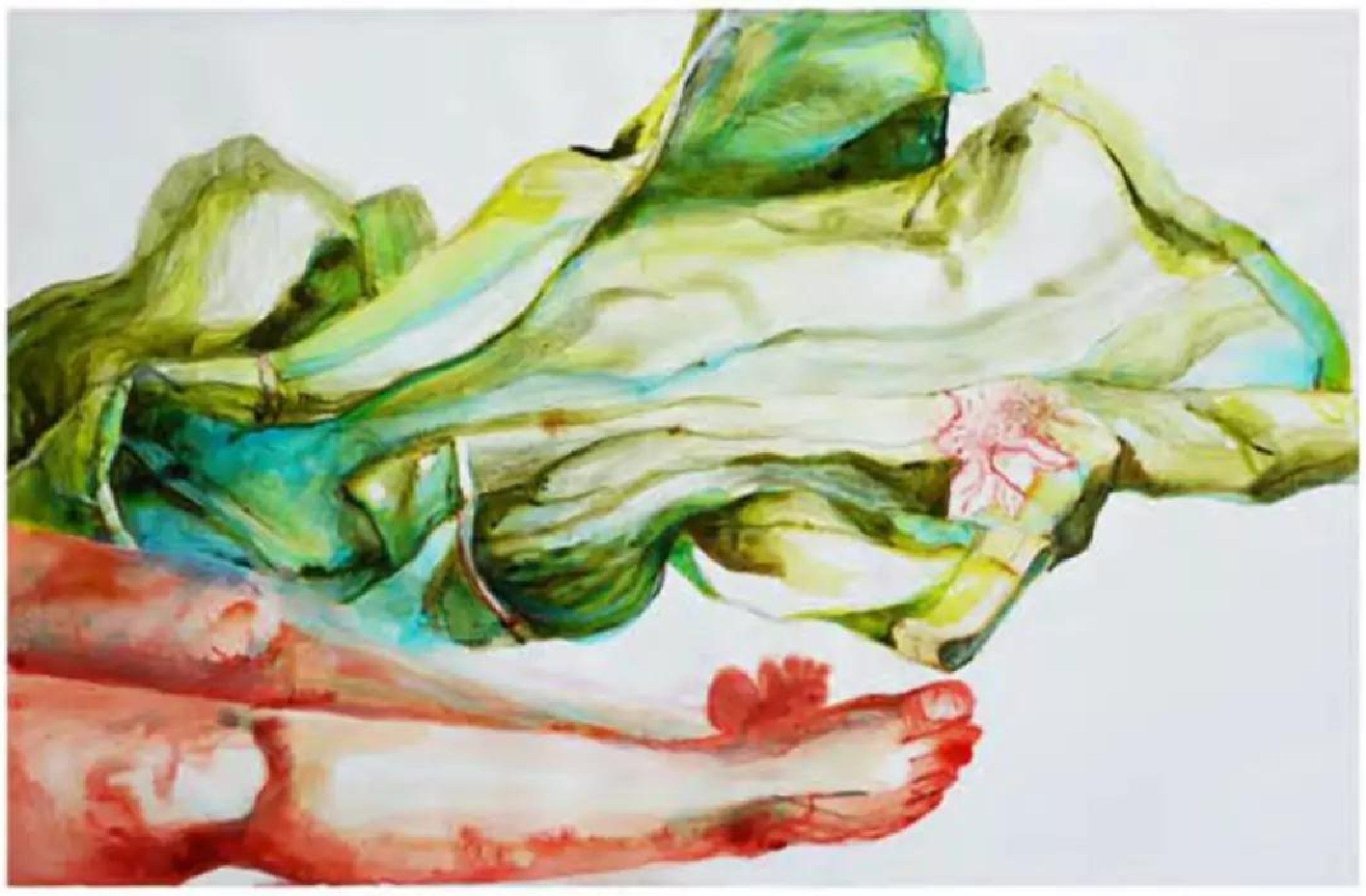
← **22** Beyond the Threshold, mixed media on canvas, 80 x 190 cm, 2009



23 Nightdress III, mixed media on canvas, 114.8 x 65 cm, 2007–2018 ->

In this context, art becomes a place of transition: a threshold between the visible and the invisible, between what we inherit and what we transform. A fragile but necessary space to welcome that which has not yet taken shape, that which resists words – and yet demands to be seen.

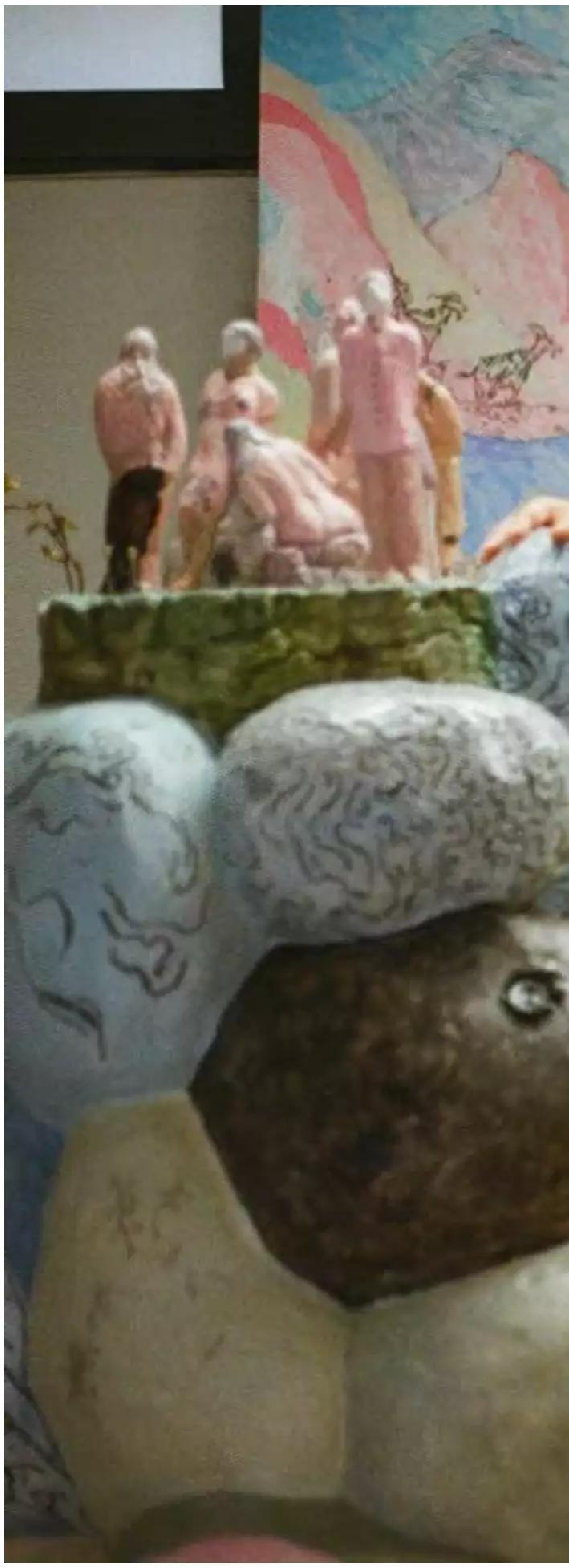




Stefanos Rokos

Alexandre Ortiz Hervias

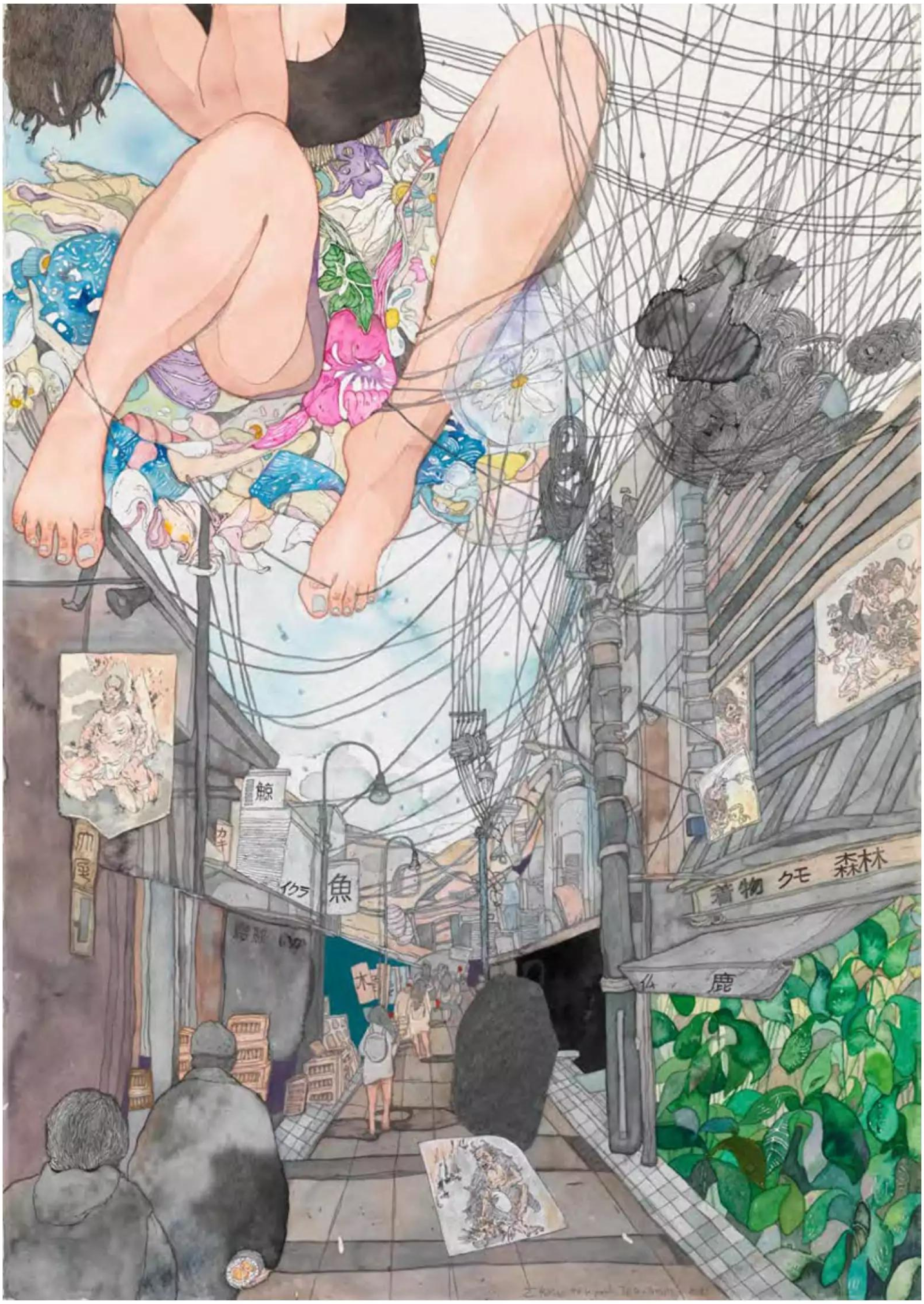
Stefanos Rokos, born in Athens in 1977, is a Greek painter and engraver who trained with Triantafyllos Patraskidis in The Athens School of Fine Arts, complemented by a postgraduate diploma in printmaking from the Wimbledon School of Art, helped shape his refined approach to drawing and colour. His deeply interdisciplinary work draws on popular culture (pop art, comics, graphic design) while cultivating an intimate and poetic modernism: he does not distort reality, but transforms it into myth – without romanticising it, but translating its ardent desire.



↓ **25** Stefanos Rokos, portrait of the artist, 2025

↓ **26** The Kimono Taito Yanaka, mixed media on paper, 100 x 70 cm, 2021

→ **27** Now Observe the Landscapes I, mixed media on canvas, 190 x 300 cm, 2023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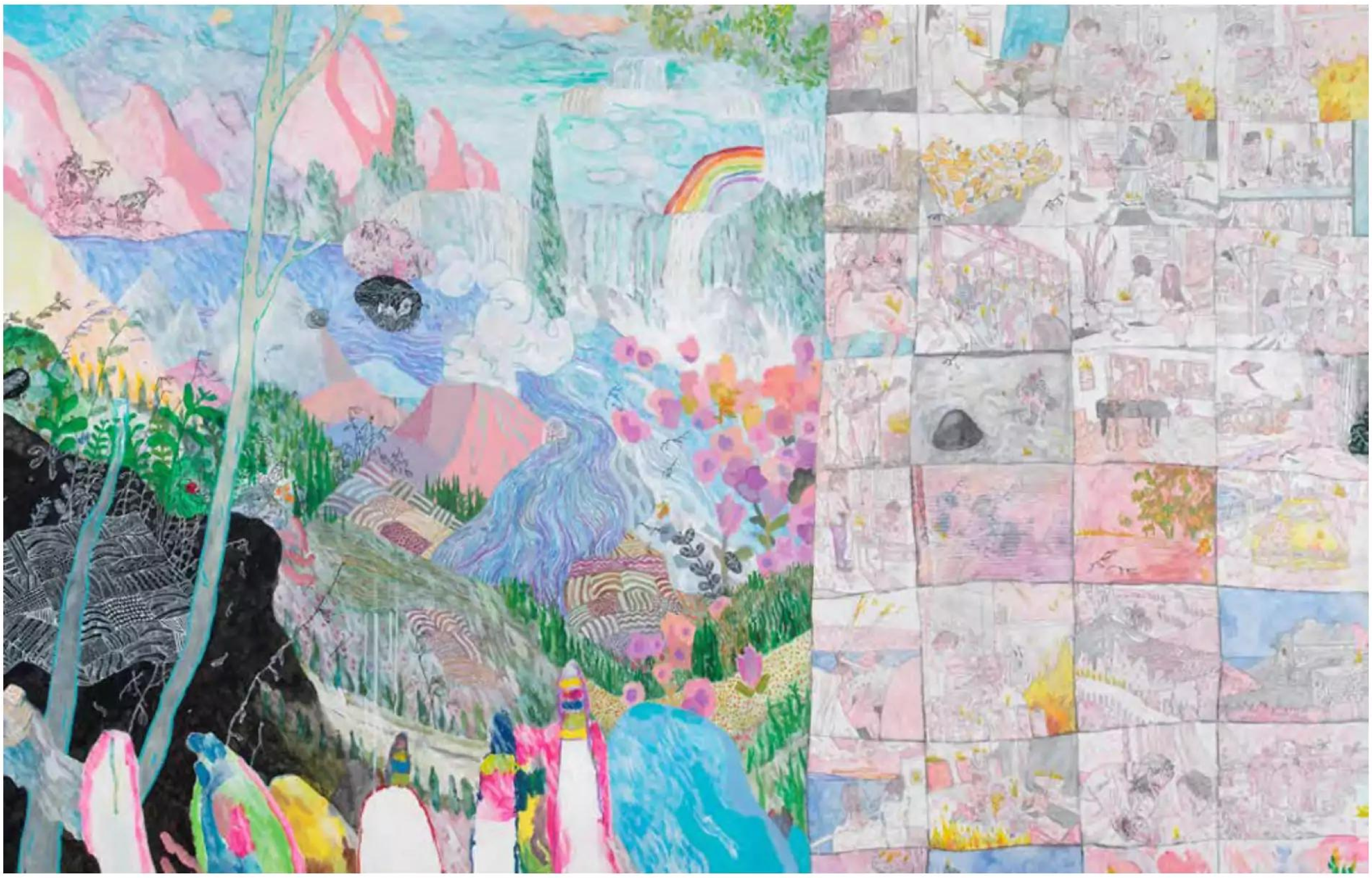


Your work combines music, literature and visual arts. Could you tell us how your artistic identity was forged, and what influences were most decisive during your early years?

Your paintings seem to oscillate between dream and reality, blending intimate scenes with almost surreal atmospheres. How would you describe your visual universe to someone discovering it for the first time?

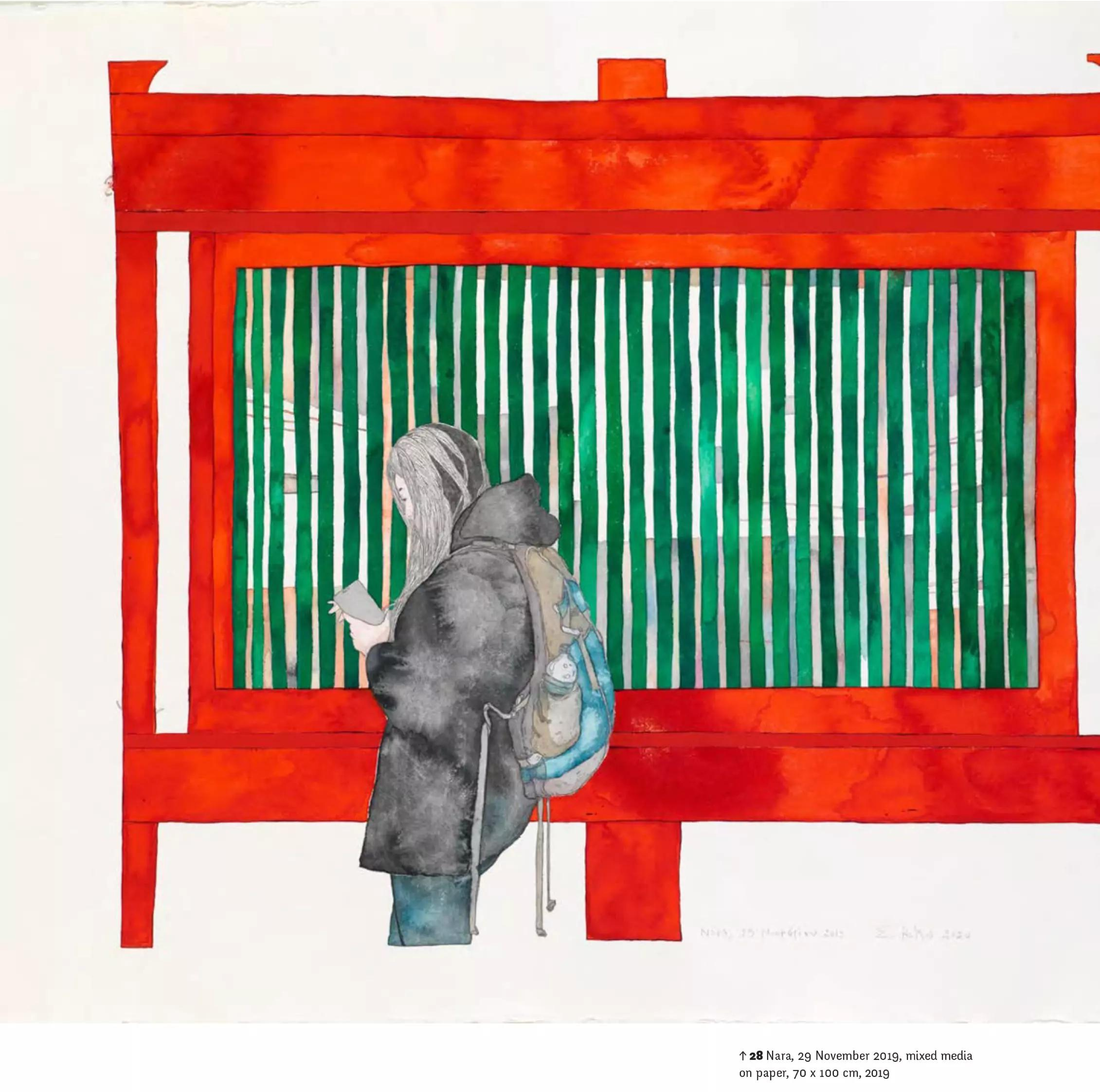
The first works that inspired me were naturally the sculptures and engravings of my parents, Kyriakos Rokos and Roubina Sarelakou, as well as the works of their friends. However, the most obvious influences during my adolescence came mainly from the world of music and cinema, or a combination of the two. I remember the impact that the film The Wall had on me, a film that was interspersed with animated sequences. It was something completely new and subversive to me. There was also Pink Floyd's concert in the ancient theatre of Pompeii, where I first saw the wonderful mosaics and murals that appear in the film and interact with the music. Very quickly, I moved on from film soundtracks to artists who influenced my aesthetic and contributed, through their art, to the formation of my artistic identity. Wim Wenders' films introduced me to Nick Cave, Lou Reed, Crime & The City Solution.

I started buying records and loving their covers: Junkyard by Birthday Party, Heatwave by The Last Drive, Too Old to Rock n Roll: Too Young to Die by Jethro Tull, Where You Been by Dinosaur Jr and Goo by Sonic Youth are some of them; in fact, I remember being very surprised that my father didn't like this cover, whereas for me it was one of the most beautiful images of my adolescence.

So, while learning new things about art, I tried to juxtapose in my work everything that disturbed me in everyday life, consciously or unconsciously, throughout my studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts.

The works that I consider to be a source of inspiration are those of David Hockney, René Magritte, Henry Darger, Hieronymus Bosch, Hokusai, Frida Kahlo, etc.

For someone unfamiliar with my work, the definition given by my friend Iphigenia is, in my opinion, the most appropriate: "minimalist pluralism". With narrative and realistic elements, motifs, lots of detail, drawing, sensitivity, noise and doodles.



↑ **28** Nara, 29 November 2019, mixed media on paper, 70 x 100 cm, 2019

You have often collaborated with musicians and even designed projects directly inspired by albums. How does music feed into your painting and, in return, how does painting influence your relationship with music?

In difficult moments of exhaustion during the creative process, moments of blockage, when I am short of solutions, ideas, perhaps even appetite, to finalise my preparatory work, or more administrative tasks, a record that I choose to listen to can 'wake me up', free my line, allow me to compose beautiful colours in my mind and on my canvas. That is my most spontaneous relationship with music. But over time, the relationship between my painting and music has matured, evolved substantially and professionally, and for years now, there has been a real creative exchange between me and my favourite musicians, who have become friends with whom I often collaborate.

Your paintings often tell fragmented stories rich in symbolism. What role does storytelling play in your work? Is there a recurring theme that runs through your different series?

When I was a student in Athens in 1995, I remember that narrative in art, especially in painting, was almost unacceptable.

I am glad that I insisted on doing what I felt, despite the opinions that I always filtered after taking them seriously. My painting has always been narrative, or at least I have always wanted it to be – by that I mean that even during my studies, I always tried to find stories so that I wouldn't get bored working on a still life, a composition or a nude.

In almost all the works I present in exhibitions, there is a main theme that develops a narrative, with recurring motifs and symbols, which I compose in such a way that part of the story remains engraved in my memory and another part leads me to question what I wanted to say.

Indeed, I believe that the symbols that appear in my works, at least over the last ten years, have this in common: they have a double meaning. The fire and kumquats in my latest exhibition, the spirit sushi, the one dedicated to my trip to Japan, the fossils in 'The Age of Electricity', the little characters closing their eyes in the exhibition on the Bad Seeds album... Each of them contains a clear, bright interpretation and a darker one.

Colour seems to play an almost narrative role in your works. How important is it to you, and how do you choose your palettes for each project?

I always start with the central theme, and the colour palette emerges sooner or later on its own. The exception to this is the exhibition
"Les Deux Temples", where I decided early on that I would use a lot of pink and black because of the Japanese print in which this combination is predominant. But I always try to give equal importance to the narrative, the drawing, the colour and the composition.

How has your experience in Athens, and more broadly in Greece, shaped your artistic vision, particularly in terms of the relationship between modernity and cultural heritage?

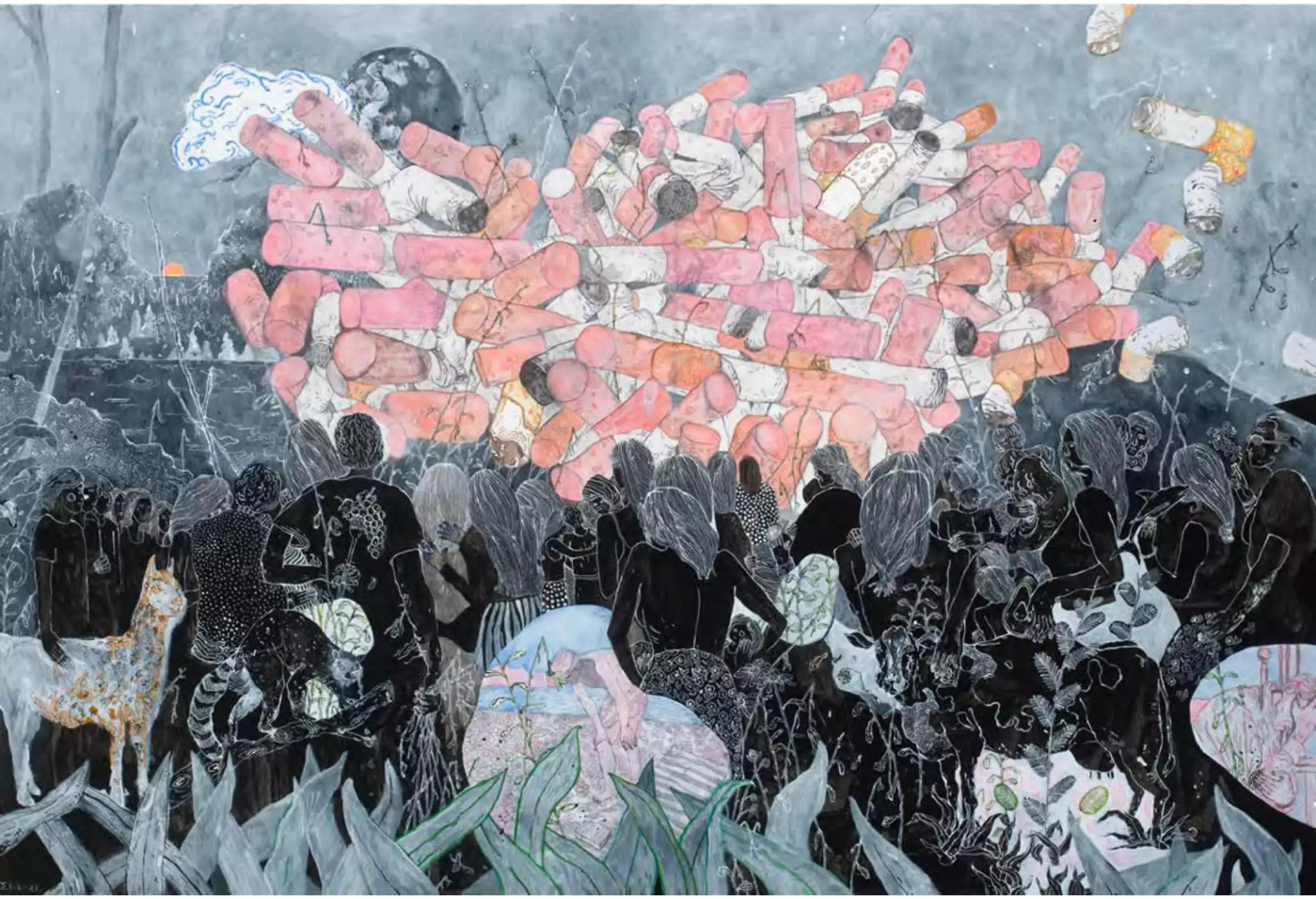
I don't know why, but from a very young age, I didn't want to belong to anything, to any group, any political party, any artistic movement. So I didn't want my painting to be characterised by my origins, by my country. I wanted to reject any hint of Hellenism in my work; I wanted it to stand on its own, without any origins. However, it is interesting to note that during the three years I spent working on the No More Shall We Part project, I chose to include several elements of Greek culture, such as Orthodox churches, priests, Greek landscapes, etc. Perhaps this was because I had decided to interpret the lyrics and music of the album through my own eyes, and these images are part of my culture precisely because of my origins.

When you start a new painting, do you begin with a specific image, emotion, or text, or do you let the composition develop organically?

I always have an idea in mind, a vague image that could change completely if necessary; and from there I begin to construct the overall composition.

You have collaborated with writers, musicians and filmmakers. What does this interdisciplinary approach bring to your artistic practice?

Just as some people wonder how a work of art can be created in an artist's studio, I am fascinated by the idea of being able to walk onto a film set or into a recording studio. Working with creators from other fields gives me this opportunity and generates new ideas and experiences. What I envied when watching Peter Jackson's documentary Get Back about The Beatles, I experienced on a different scale during the recording of Nick Cave's Ghosteen, on most of Stef Kamil Carlens' albums, on Vasilis Katsoupis' film Inside, and on several other occasions. This is how I learn how other artists work together. This helps me in my own collaborations and allows me to draw new images that I incorporate into my work. I also learn how the synthesis of images and sounds works in other art forms, which helps me to develop my own mode of visual orchestration on a painted surface. All of this fills me with positive energy and propels me forward in my practice.



↑ **29** Nightscape with Full Moon etc., mixed media on canvas, 100 x 150 cm, 2023

→ **30** Third Session, mixed media on paper, 107 x 78 cm, 2023

What role do you assign to the viewer? Your works seem to lend themselves to multiple interpretations. Was it your intention to offer such freedom of interpretation?

In the books that accompany my exhibitions, especially those in which I have collaborated with Stereoma Publishing, I make sure to write a short text with the thoughts that led me to create them. From there, I am very attentive to the audience's interpretations. Even if an interpretation is not identical to my intention, I like to reflect on what led that viewer to give their own explanation of my work. Multiple interpretations are totally acceptable, and my work is not limited to a single point of view. "Everyone who sees the moon possesses a ray of it," my girlfriend said to me yesterday, and I liked that phrase, which exudes a certain naivety, but also a certain wisdom.

What projects are you currently working on, and what horizons would you like to explore in the coming years, whether in painting or beyond?

On 18 August 2025, I presented five paintings at Georgia Tseri's Follow your Art gallery in Kapsali, on the island of Kythira, alongside the same number of sculptures by artist Cleopatra Tsalis. I have also been working for some time on the visual identity of the 66th Thessaloniki International Film Festival, which will take place this year from 30 October to 9 November. The original works will be exhibited at the Art Athina international contemporary art fair from 18 to 21 September, representing the Zoumboulakis Gallery and in collaboration with the festival, and then in Thessaloniki during the festival. At the same time, I am collaborating for the third time with animator Fokionas Xenos and musician Jim Sclavunos to create two animated short films. For the future, I remain open to anything that interests and intrigues me in all fields. I would like to remain cautious and selective in my decisions, and continue to work with people with whom I feel comfortable artistically, but also on a human level.

His entire career reflects a constant search for balance between disciplines, eras and sensibilities, placing Stefanos Rokos in the tradition of artists for whom painting remains both an intimate language and a universal dialogue.

Yosra Mojtahedi

Eduardo Pérez Viloria

Venezuelan writer, poet and communicator

Yosra Mojtahedi, 36, is an artist born in Iran and based in in France, whose work constitutes a meeting point between memory and modernity. Trained in a context marked by the aesthetic and symbolic richness of Persian tradition, his artistic vision is nourished by the tensions and harmonies between East and West, between the intimate and the universal.

31 Portrait of the artist with the work L'Érosarbénus, 2024 →

In her creations, Mojtahedi uses mixed media to explore issues such as identity, uprooting, women as custodians of memory, and the place of the individual in a constantly changing world. Her works are both fragments of biography and open reflections, where visual elements become metaphors for personal and collective experiences.

Based in France for several years, she has participated in international exhibitions and festivals, establishing an artistic voice recognised for its ability to engage with different contexts and traditions. In her work, layers of colour, texture and symbolism act as an invisible bridge connecting the streets and landscapes of her childhood to the European present she inhabits.

More than just representing, Yosra Mojtahedi seeks to reveal: to open up spaces for contemplation where the viewer is confronted with the essential question of who they are and where they come from.

32 Anahithanor, sculptural, moving and sound installation, variable dimensions, 2025

As an artist born in Iran and based in France, how does your body bear the marks of two worlds, two languages, two rhythms of life?

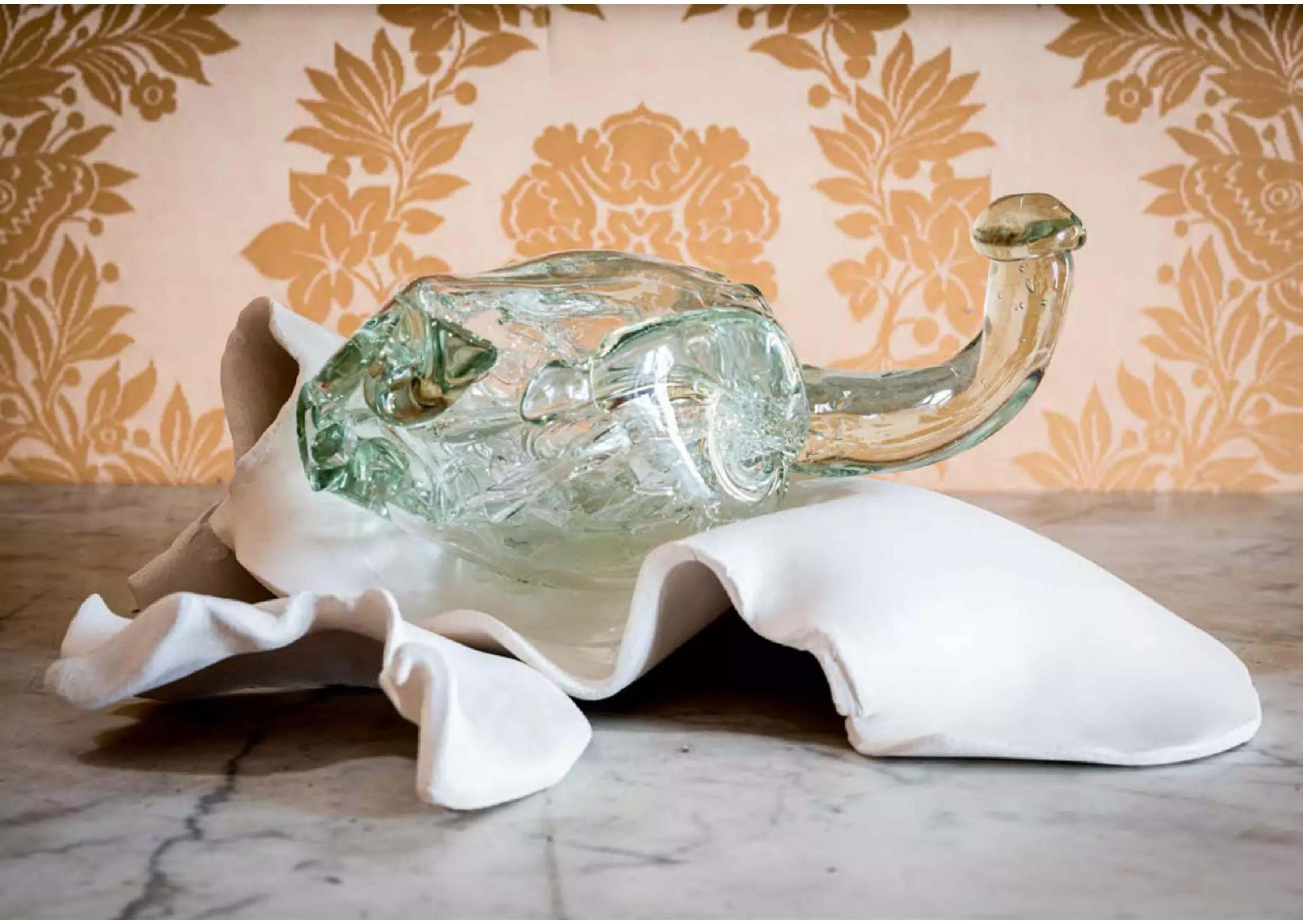
The day I turned the page of my sketchbook, it wasn't just a simple gesture, it was a gentle fracture, a discreet crack through which another light slipped in. Born in Iran, I grew up in a geography that was woven into my very skin: a geography of implicit rights, codified gestures, and inhabited silences. Until I had known another land, another language, I believed that my contours were fixed, definitive.

How has this crossing of borders, languages and rhythms transformed your creative process and your relationship with space?

This journey revealed a greater truth to me: I still only know half of my own physical existence. At first, it was a struggle. My brush, like my body, tried to repeat the same shapes, the same learned movements. My mind clung to its old reference points, like a sea refusing to accept the storm. Everything resisted.

And then, slowly, something cracked from within. A new eye opened. Or perhaps a thinner skin, capable of picking up other frequencies. The world around me became a mirror: it reflected back to me the layers of who I was, what I had learned to be – and what I could become.

During this journey, my body began to demand more space. In the past, it remained silent in an intimate dialogue between myself, the canvas, and the paint: a sacred, enclosed, almost ritualistic space. Today, it aspires to create within a broader, living, organic relationship—connected to the elements that shape our existence: time, architecture, matter, sensations. I seek to weave links between the invisible and the tangible, between emotion and form, between what cannot be seen and what is revealed through matter.



The Persian word hozoor, meaning ‘روضح ’, occupies an important place in your thinking. What does it mean to you and how is it embodied in your work?

This word literally means "presence". But in a spiritual sense, especially in Sufi and Persian mystical traditions, hozoor goes far beyond simple physical or material presence. Hozoor refers to a subtle, almost imperceptible presence of a being or thing – an invisible but vibrant trace that infuses energy and inhabits a place or moment. It is an imprint that does not impose itself, but permeates, crosses the mind and provokes emotion. It is this quality that I seek to bring out in my work today: a presence without contours, but intensely felt. It is not an abstract idea, but rather a direct inner perception that awakens the consciousness, the heart and the body.

You mention a very strong scent, that of roses. Can you describe how this scent influenced your childhood?

Certainly. An invisible presence. She was everywhere. In kitchens where fragrant dishes simmered, in ceremonies where spaces were purified to welcome the sacred, in mourning rituals where the divine mingled with grief. She bathed the days, the nights, the gestures, the prayers.

This rose seems to symbolise much more than just a flower. What does it represent in your artistic work today?

In my memory, the rose is not just a flower: it is a wave. It floats between poetry and everyday life, between the sweetness of memory and the density of mystery. It appeared in the verses we learned by heart, in the gestures of my mother and other women, in the kitchen, on stones, in fabrics. It embodies an ambiguity: it heals, it comforts, it is the scent of desire, but it also accompanies departure, endings, separation. Even today, it permeates my work – olfactorily, symbolically, carnally. I invoke it as one calls upon an ancient memory. It returns in my installations, in my sculptures, in my words.

You mention a very original project involving a scientific laboratory. Can you tell us more about this 'flower beat'?

One of my latest projects was inspired by this image: "When you cannot see your lover, your heart aches; and when you find them again, your heart opens up. " It is a vivid metaphor for the rose – that heart that opens and closes, beating to the rhythm of absence and desire. With a scientific laboratory called DEFROST, I created a soft robot organ that embodies this: the beating of a flower. This project is currently in the prototyping stage.

← **33** Labyrinth, ceramic, glass,
variable dimensions, 2024

When you work with organic or robotic materials, do you seek to reveal something that transcends mere matter?

Whether organic or robotic, matter is for me a means of bringing something invisible to light. What I am looking for is not so much the matter itself, but what it allows us to experience, to reveal. Through my works, I try to breathe a kind of soul into them, an inner energy, as if I were giving birth to a body that did not yet exist – a body that lies between the inert and the living.

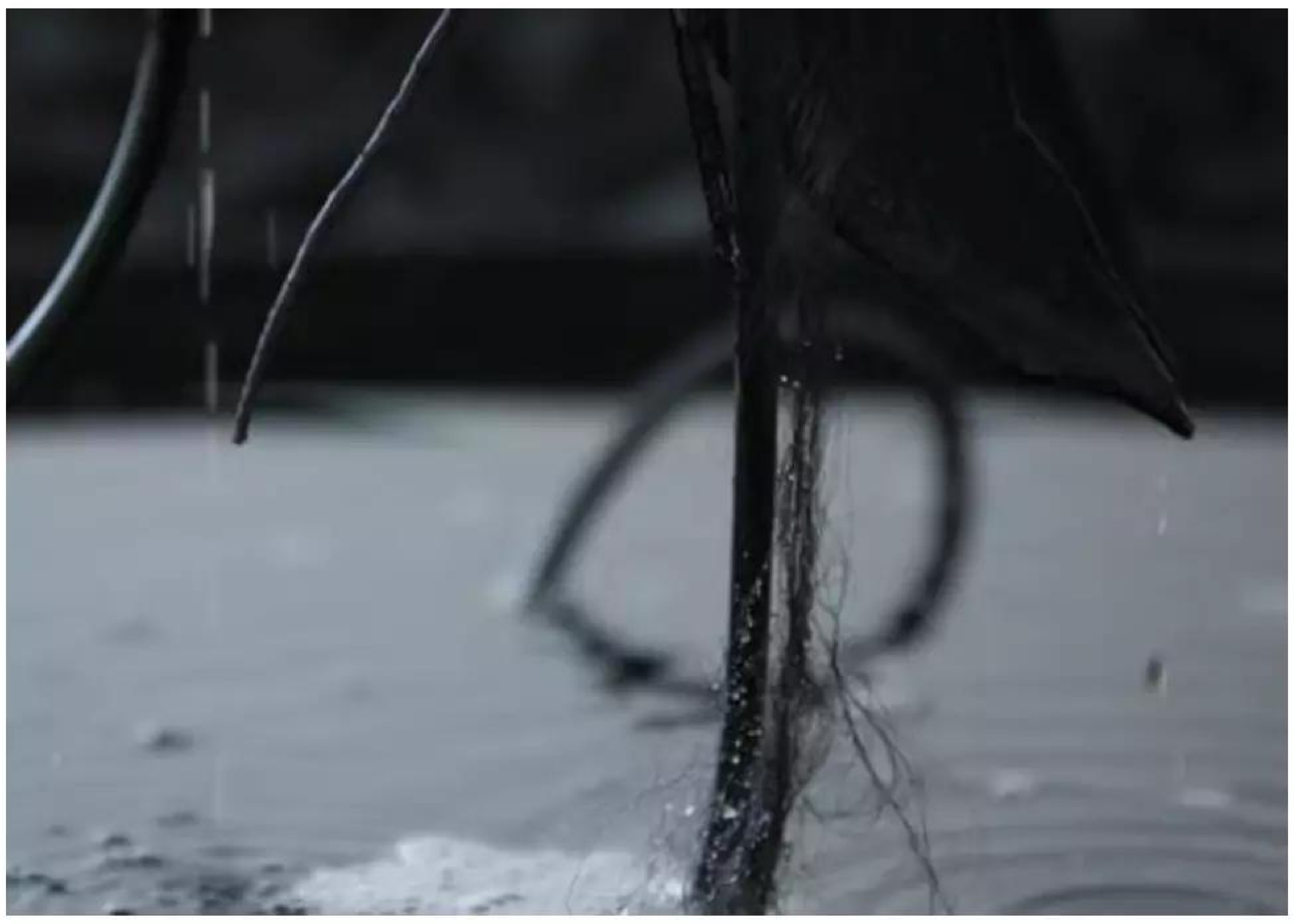
You say that organic materials carry a sensitive and political memory. Can you tell us more about this dimension?

Organic materials, such as hair, fabrics, smells or fluids, carry within them a sensitive, physical and even political memory. Technological devices help me to animate them, to make them move, breathe and react. One extends the other. Together, they allow a form of presence to emerge.

How would you like the viewer to experience this encounter where matter becomes a vessel for life and mystery?

I try to create an experience where the material becomes secondary, because it is permeated by something stronger: an emotion, a sensation, a disturbance. Smell, sound, light, rhythm – all these things help to awaken the viewer's body, to put it in a receptive state. What I am trying to provoke is a moment when matter ceases to be merely physical and becomes a carrier of life and mystery. It is an attempt, perhaps, to make magic exist.

34 Exodus, sculptural installation, moving and sound, variable dimensions, 2023



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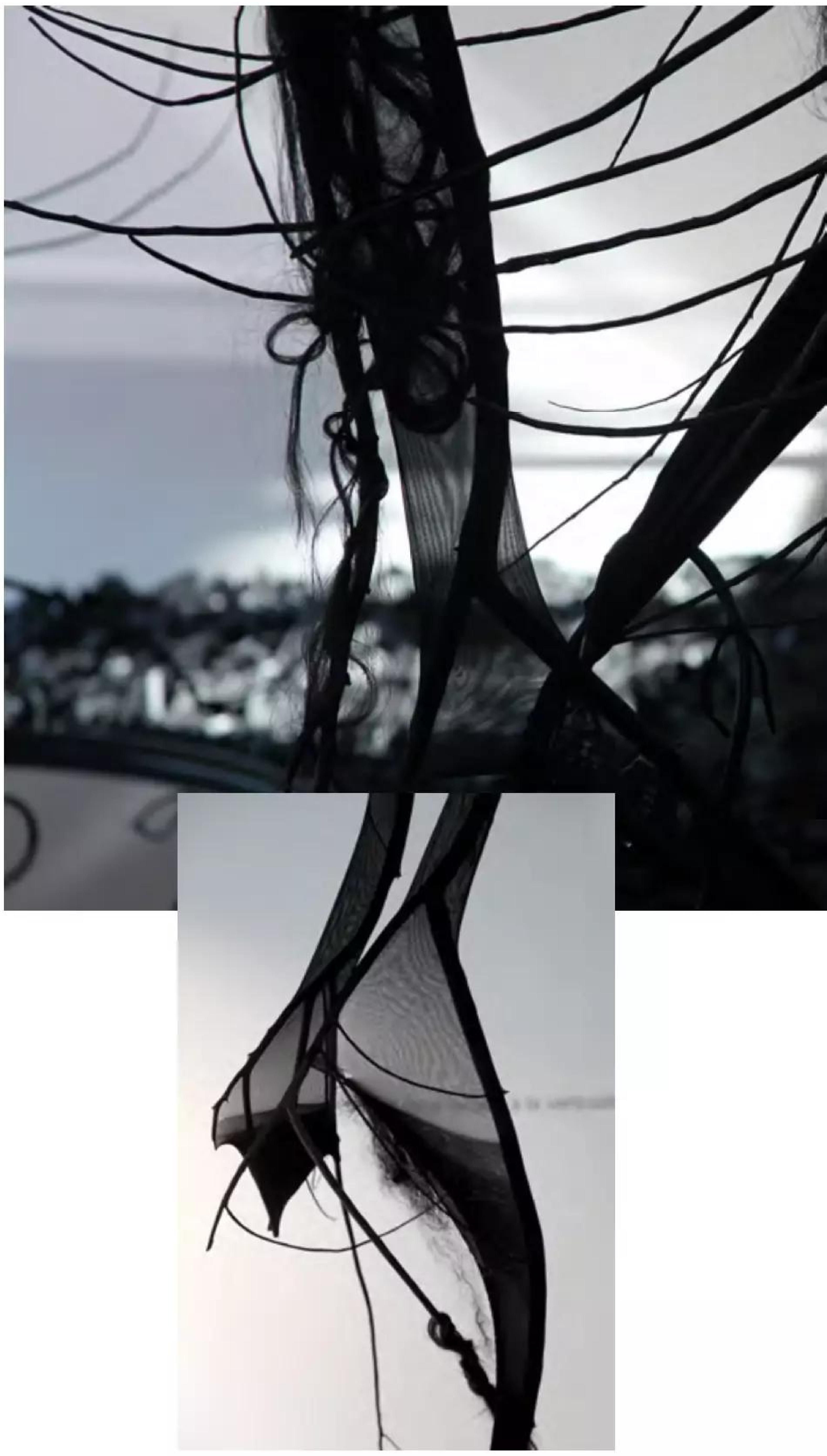


↑35 Exodus, sculptural installation, moving and sound, variable dimensions, 2023

36 The sky is not blue, print on carpet, variable dimensions, 2022 →

Have you ever felt that your own body could be a territory for artistic experimentation?

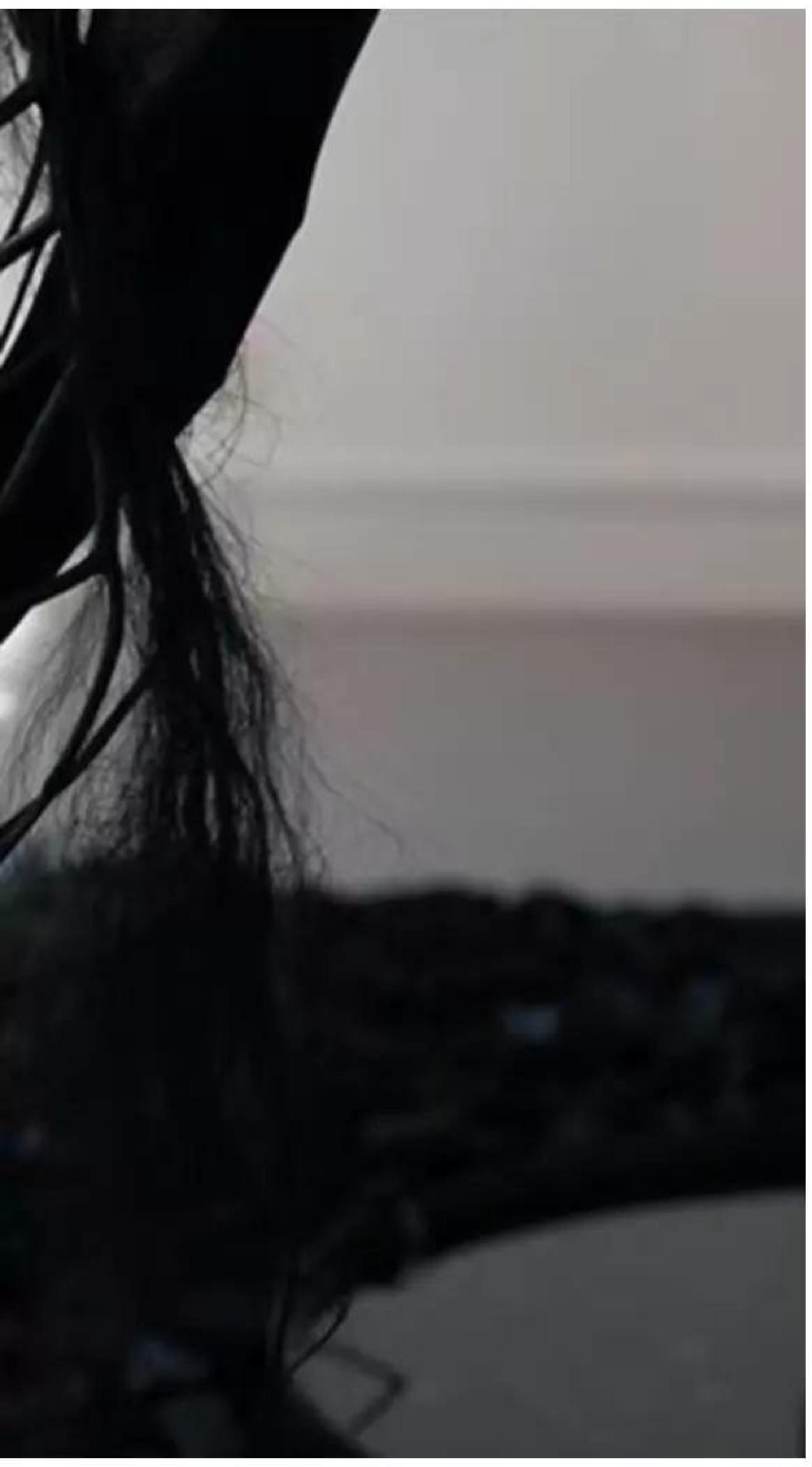
Yes, of course. My body is a territory for experimentation. It is a place of memory, sensation, struggle and creation. Everything I create is born from lived experience – an experience that is never limited to the mind, but also passes through the body, in its flesh, its rhythms, its limits.

It can be said that your body also bears the marks of history, culture, and even political struggles. How does this influence your art?

This body is not neutral. It bears the marks of our country, our culture, our history. It has been shaped by religious, political and social frameworks. It has experienced prohibition, censorship and restraint. But at the same time, it always seeks to go beyond, towards a form of liberation, momentum, fulfilment. This is why the intimate quickly becomes political.

Can you explain how this political dimension of your body manifests itself in your artistic work and in broader movements?

What I experience, what I feel, what I express through my work is not just about me. My body also carries the stories of many other women – those of my generation, those of my country, those whose voices are often silenced. What at first seems individual – a gesture, a pain, an inner rebellion – joins a wider river. And this river flows towards others, until it forms a sea, a collective cry. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement was born in Iran in this way: from intimate pain that became political strength, from a personal desire for freedom that became a shared voice. My body, like that of so many others, is transformed into a place of resistance and embodiment. And art is a way of giving it form, breath and resistance. This is where poetry and metaphor become necessary in a society.



37 Sexus Fleurus, interactive moving and sound sculpture installation, variable dimensions, 2021–2025 →

Your works evoke rich sensory landscapes. What role does silence play in this vibrant material you create?

For me, silence is that suspended moment when something begins to exist between the work and the viewer. It is the threshold. When the viewer arrives in front of my installations – whether they are body-landscapes or body-fountains – a form of contemplation sets in, almost without them realising it. Silence is not empty: it is filled with a particular kind of attention, a held breath, an opening up to listening.

How does this silence influence the viewer's sensory experience of your work?

It is a moment when we take the time to slow down and let ourselves be penetrated by what vibrates in matter: fluids, smells, heat, barely perceptible movements. This silence creates a paradoxical experience: at once soothing, almost hypnotic… and sometimes unsettling, because it takes us back to something very intimate, in a shared space.

Can you explain why this moment of silence is so essential to the revelation of the work?

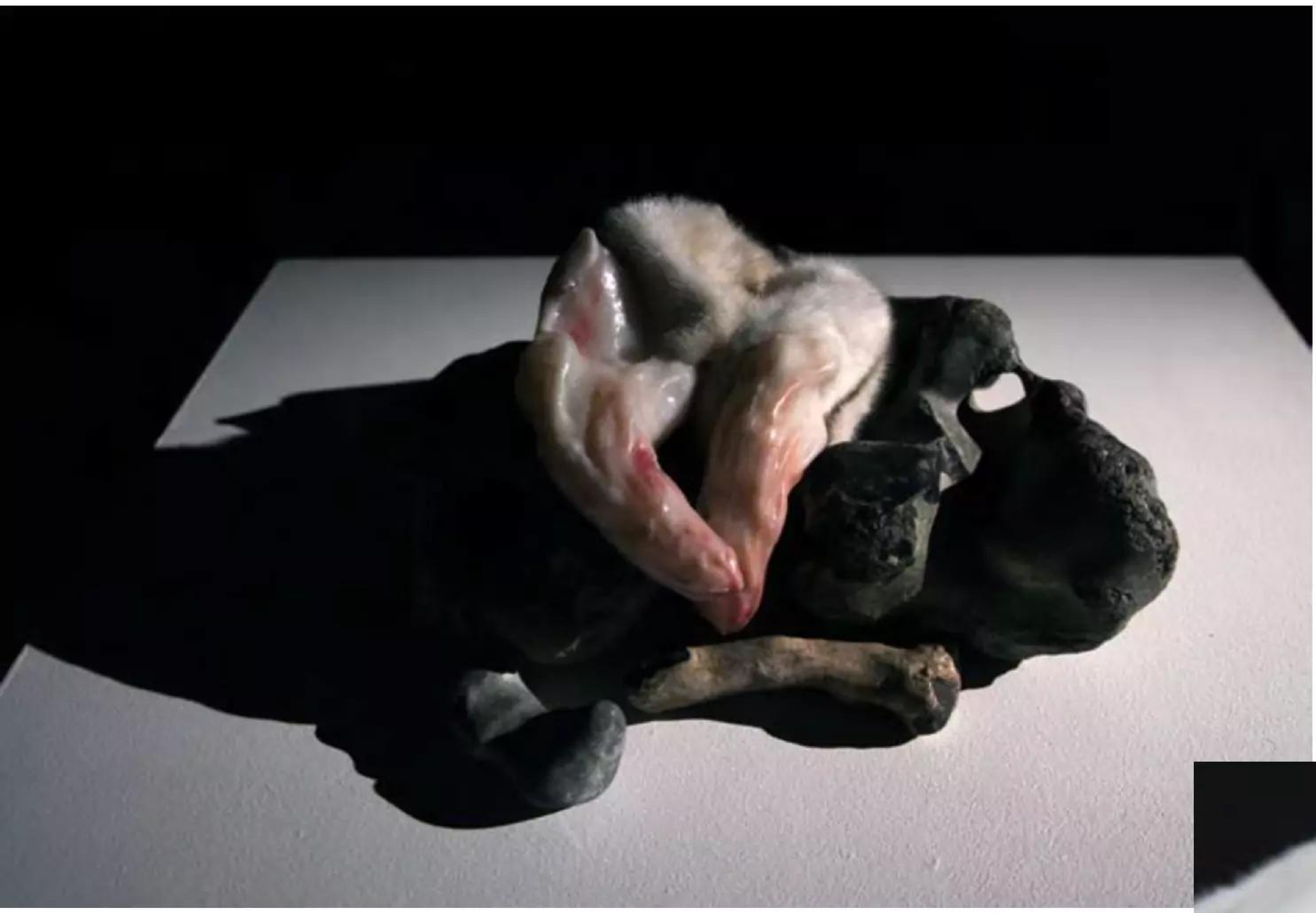
It awakens buried sensations, memories, forgotten landscapes – through sound, smell, the rhythm of shapes. This moment of silence is essential: it is what makes the work truly sensory. It is in silence that things can reveal themselves. Silence becomes the condition for the work to breathe, and for the viewer to also breathe in and connect with the essence of the work.

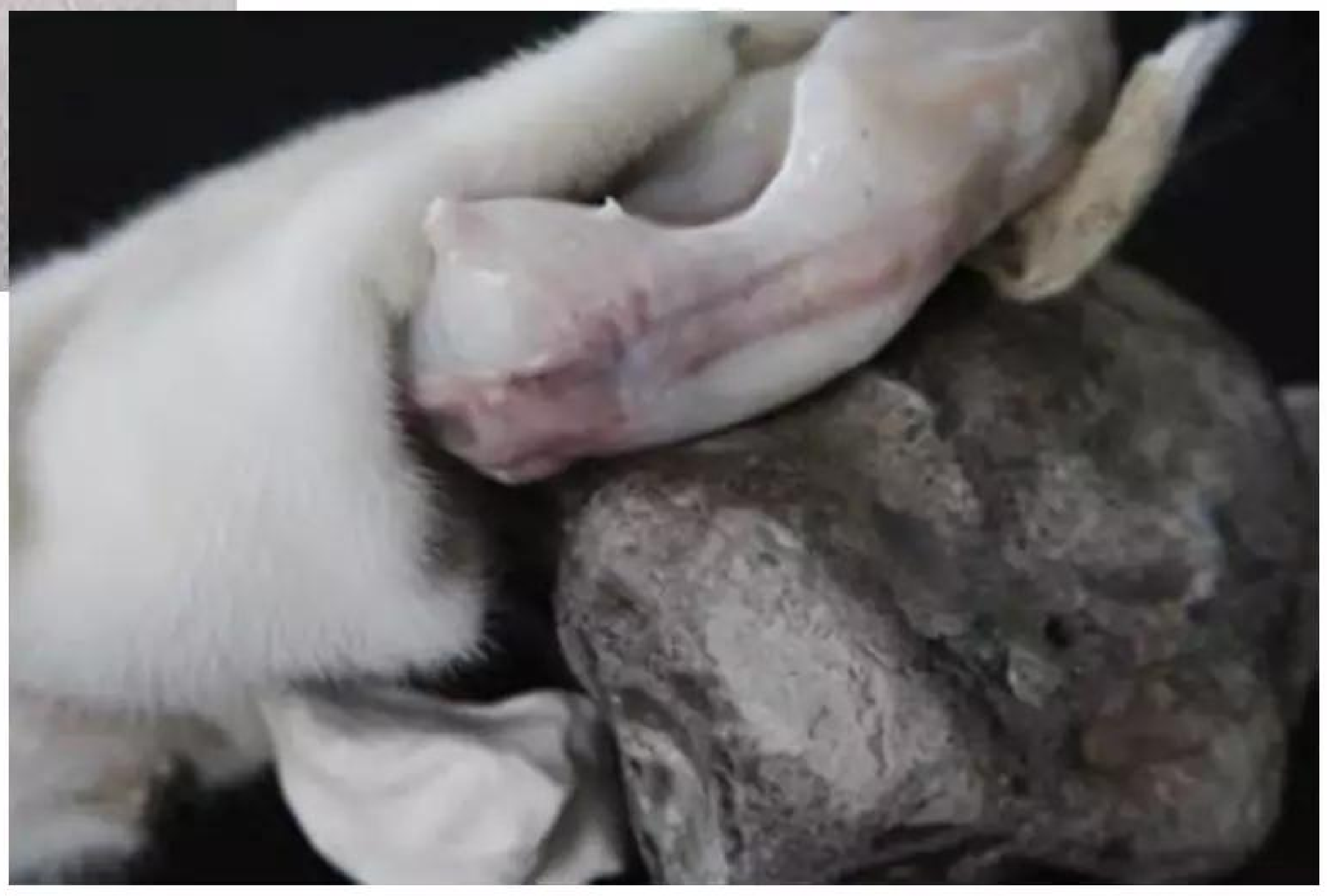
What does it mean to you to create works that breathe, that quiver, that seem almost to be waiting to be touched?

As a woman, I never wanted to give birth through my own body – and that was almost traumatic. But this absence also raised another question in me: how else can we breathe life into something? How can we bring to life that which is not alive? That's where it all started. I began to imagine artificial bodies, sculpted presences, hybrid forms between the real and the unreal, which seem to breathe, vibrate, and pulsate.

How do viewers react to these works, and what do you think this reaction reveals?

When a body, even an inert one, shows signs of life in a public space, it creates a sense of unease – a hesitation between object and being, between matter and flesh. And then something unexpected happens: spectators are spontaneously drawn to it, they want to touch it. I do not invite them to do so directly, but the work provokes this reaction, almost in spite of itself and its fragility. This desire for contact touches me deeply. It says something about our human nature: like children who learn about the world through touch, we need to feel in order to understand, to make contact in order to feel. Touch creates an immediate, intimate, physical, almost instinctive relationship. The nervous system reacts, recognises, connects. There is a form of empathy here – an encounter with an 'other' that is not alive in the biological sense. And it is precisely in this grey area that I place my work: between absence and presence, between silence and breath, between the human and the material. Where, perhaps, another form of birth becomes possible.





In Sexus Fleurus, the machine becomes sensitive, responsive, almost erotic. What are you trying to achieve by representing this sensuality in your work?

In my work, I often try to shift the gaze – to undo the conditioning that makes us associate certain forms with forbidden, sexual or taboo areas. I try to bring back to a more raw, sensitive and free state what society has sacralised or eroticised to excess. Sexus Fleurus is part of this approach. It is not an erotic work in the strict sense, but it profoundly questions our perception of life, desire and the body. It breathes, it pulsates, it responds to touch: it evokes a nameless organism, somewhere between a flower, a muscle and an animal.

Some people see sexual forms or a taboo in them. How do you respond to these interpretations?

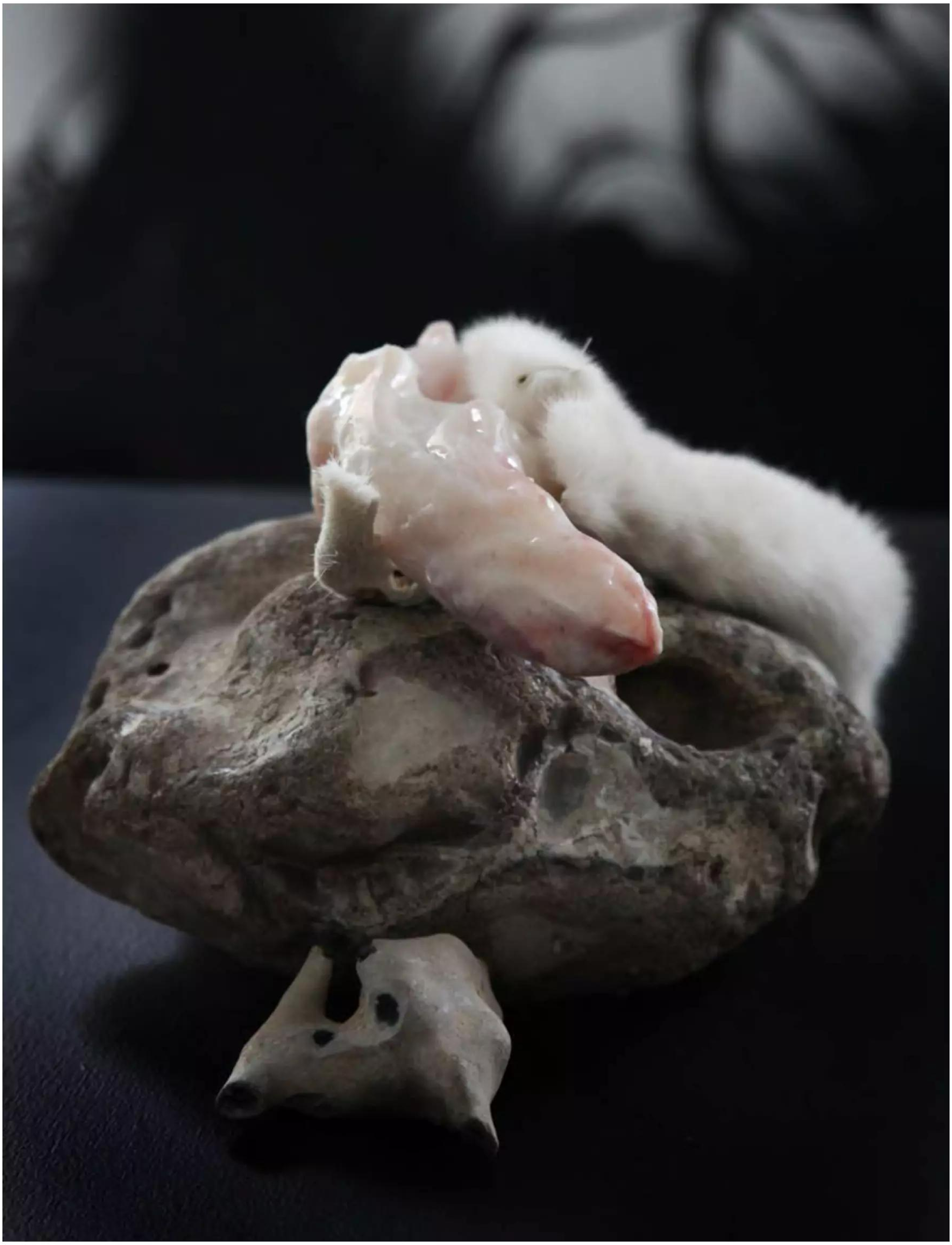
Yes. Some people see sexual forms in it – a moving sex organ, exposed flesh. But I think this interpretation comes from the way we have learned to name forms. We have codified the body – especially the female body – to such an extent that we immediately project meanings onto what is simply vibration, pulsation, breath. What's interesting is that children don't have this interpretative framework: they see a living being, a moving organ, a curious, soft, intriguing shape. This proves that sexualisation is a construct, not a given.

What is the broader significance of Sexus Fleurus in your artistic approach?

For me, Sexus Fleurus is not a provocation. It is an attempt to invent another way of representing life. To make tactile what is often hidden. To create a sensory object that reacts to presence, engaging the viewer's body in an almost empathetic relationship. The work then becomes a meeting place – why not a fantasy, and a shared sensation? It challenges the way we see sexuality, touch and feel. So much the better if it disturbs, provokes or questions everything that is taboo about our bodies and our desires.

Do you create to fill a void or to name a lack?

I am not seeking to fill a void – I believe that some voids can never be filled. I create to make them visible, tangible, to give them space, form, vibration. There is an intensity in absence that drives me to create. It is like a tension that demands to be embodied: a restrained word, an impeded body, a fragmented memory. What I do is perhaps lend them breath, a temporary body, movement. I seek neither to repair nor to erase, but to accompany this emptiness, to make it palpable – not so that it disappears, but so that it becomes shareable. Matter, technology and the organic serve me in this: to bring into existence a sensation, an invisible presence, an absence that persists and yet, through the work, can be touched in a different way.



38 Sexus Fleurus, sculptural installation, interactive, moving and sound-based, variable dimensions, 2021-2025

39 Lilith, moving sculptural and sound installation, variable dimensions, 2023 →

In Lilith, you invoke a mythical figure who is often censored or distorted. How is Lilith similar to you?

Lilith is a mystical and ancient figure, often censored, distorted or erased from traditional narratives. Yet she embodies a profound freedom, a rebellion against submission, a refusal to be confined to imposed roles. I recognise myself in Lilith because she carries this powerful duality: at once excluded and essential, silent and yet so present. She is a myth, yes, but a living myth that spans the centuries and continues to inhabit the bodies and voices of women today. Like Lilith, many contemporary women experience being both desired and rejected, visible and invisible, strong yet constrained by social and political norms. In my work, Lilith becomes a symbol of this quest: to embody intimate and collective freedom, to thwart prohibitions, and to reinvent a form of autonomy that refuses dispossession. She is a wild and fragile presence, a myth that invites us to rethink what it means to be a woman today.

Do you feel that your work contributes to healing – personal, collective, feminine?

For me, creating is first and foremost an inner necessity: it is a vital gesture, a way of connecting with what has been wounded, constrained or silenced in my body, in my history, in my memory. Through the act of creation, I transform these dark areas, I make them visible, tangible, shareable. But this transformation does not belong to me alone. By expressing myself, I become a particle in a larger movement, an invisible circle in which others can also find echo, resonance, and healing. Art heals!

How do you perceive the impact of your works on others?

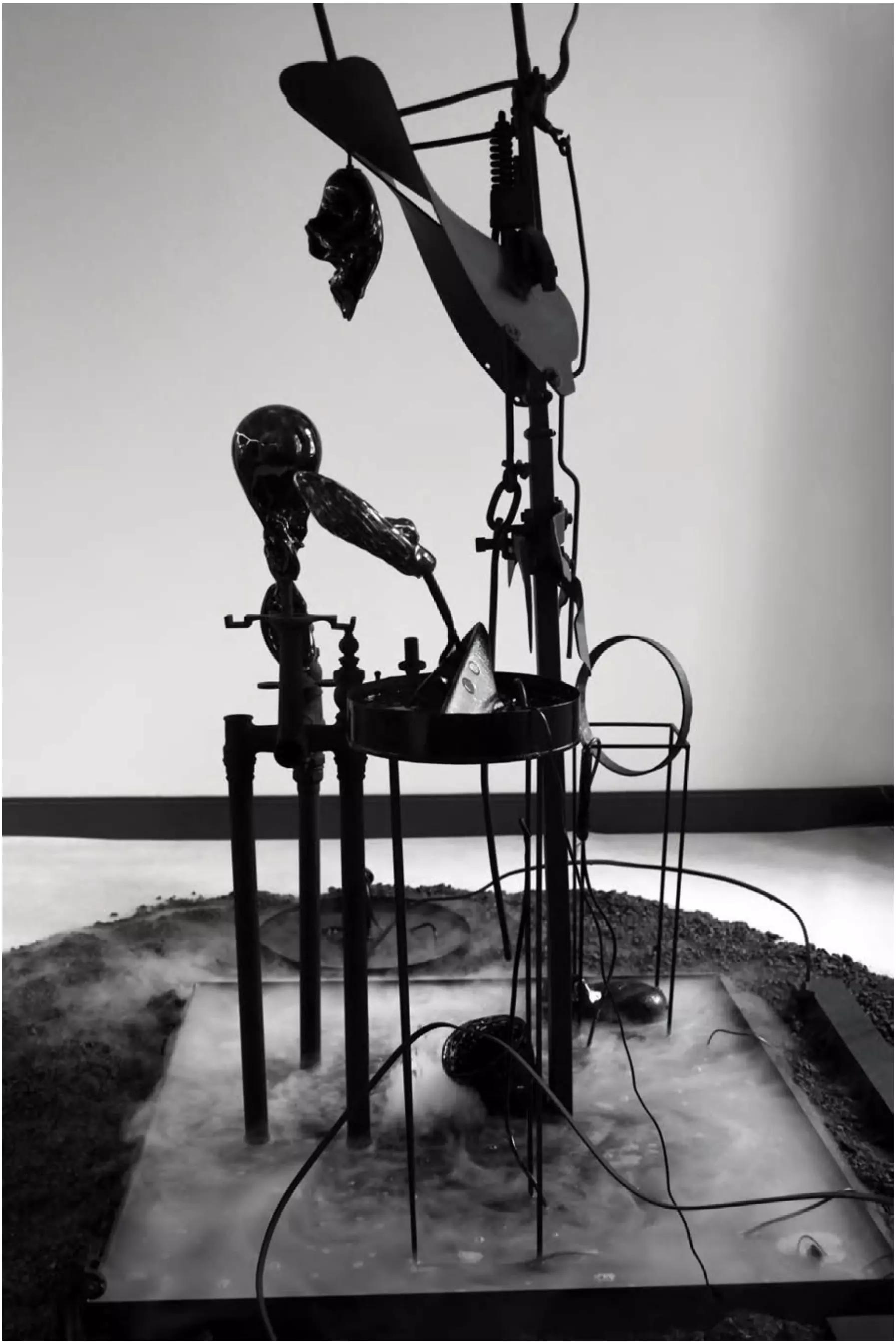
I like to think that my works, through their sensory language – their breath, their skin, their material, their rhythm – can touch deep places within others, and perhaps open up spaces for healing or reconnection. In a way, there is something shamanic or spiritual about my approach. In a mystical sense, like a passage: the artist becomes a channel, an interface between the visible and invisible worlds, between buried memories and new forms. The body of the work becomes a place of transformation.

What role do technologies play in your artistic pursuit and this form of healing?

Today, the technological tools I use allow me to go even further in this quest: they give skin, breath and movement to the invisible. Thanks to robotics, intelligent materials and sensitive programming, I can embody a presence that seems alive, almost inhabited. This allows me to conjure up a form of contemporary magic – a modern-day shamanism, technopoetics. – which can deeply touch the intimate, without using words. I am not trying to label this approach, but it is true that the way it evokes sensitivity, memory, care and resonance is often perceived as deeply feminine. In any case, it addresses what, in each of us, needs to be heard, recognised and perhaps healed.

What is your relationship to pain in creativity: catalyst, memory, resistance?

The pain is there, always in the background. It is not a direct source of inspiration, but an underlying force – a memory of the body, a scar of history, a fold in consciousness. I don't seek it out, but it inhabits creation, like a discreet breath. Sometimes it becomes a catalyst, sometimes resistance, sometimes a slow metamorphosis. What matters to me is what escapes, what remains in motion, what transforms even after the work has appeared. My sculptures, even when they seem frozen, are in fact traversed by breaths, rhythms. They still breathe, even in silence. That is probably why I am always afraid of freezing an idea. A fixed form becomes almost a death. I prefer a work to remain porous, to continue to vibrate in the gaze or body of the person who receives it. For me, creating means accepting incompleteness, fragility, the survival of a form. There is something about it that is alive, almost alive. A tension between disappearance and persistence. Pain that becomes breath, a trace that becomes presence. And that, perhaps, is what drives me to continue.



What is your relationship with doubt in the artistic process? Is it a driving force or an obstacle?

Doubt is at the heart of my creative process. It is neither a simple obstacle nor a driving force in the traditional sense of the term: it is the very condition of creation. I create precisely because I doubt. I doubt the world, what I perceive, what I feel, what I understand. And this doubt becomes a kind of inner movement, a tension that compels me to seek, to question, to transform. I never start from a place of certainty. It is uncertainty that drives me to explore. What form will the work take? When will it be finished? Will it be able to convey what I feel, what I cannot express in any other way? Is it even necessary to create? Is it useful? Is it right? The world is already saturated with images, sounds, stories... so why add anything else? And sometimes, yes, I tell myself that maybe I should stop. That creating in a wounded, fragmented world, with so many boundaries, might seem futile. There is one thing I have no doubt about: creating is a vital act for me. Even in the vertigo of doubt, I feel the need to bring something into being, to embody a sensation, a lack, a desire for unity. Doubt keeps me moving. It prevents me from freezing, from resting on an idea, a form, a method. And it is this instability that makes each work alive, incomplete, always in the making. A work never fully answers the question that gave rise to it. But it leaves a trace of the path. And it is perhaps there, in this tension between chaos, the unfinished and the necessary, that creation finds its meaning.

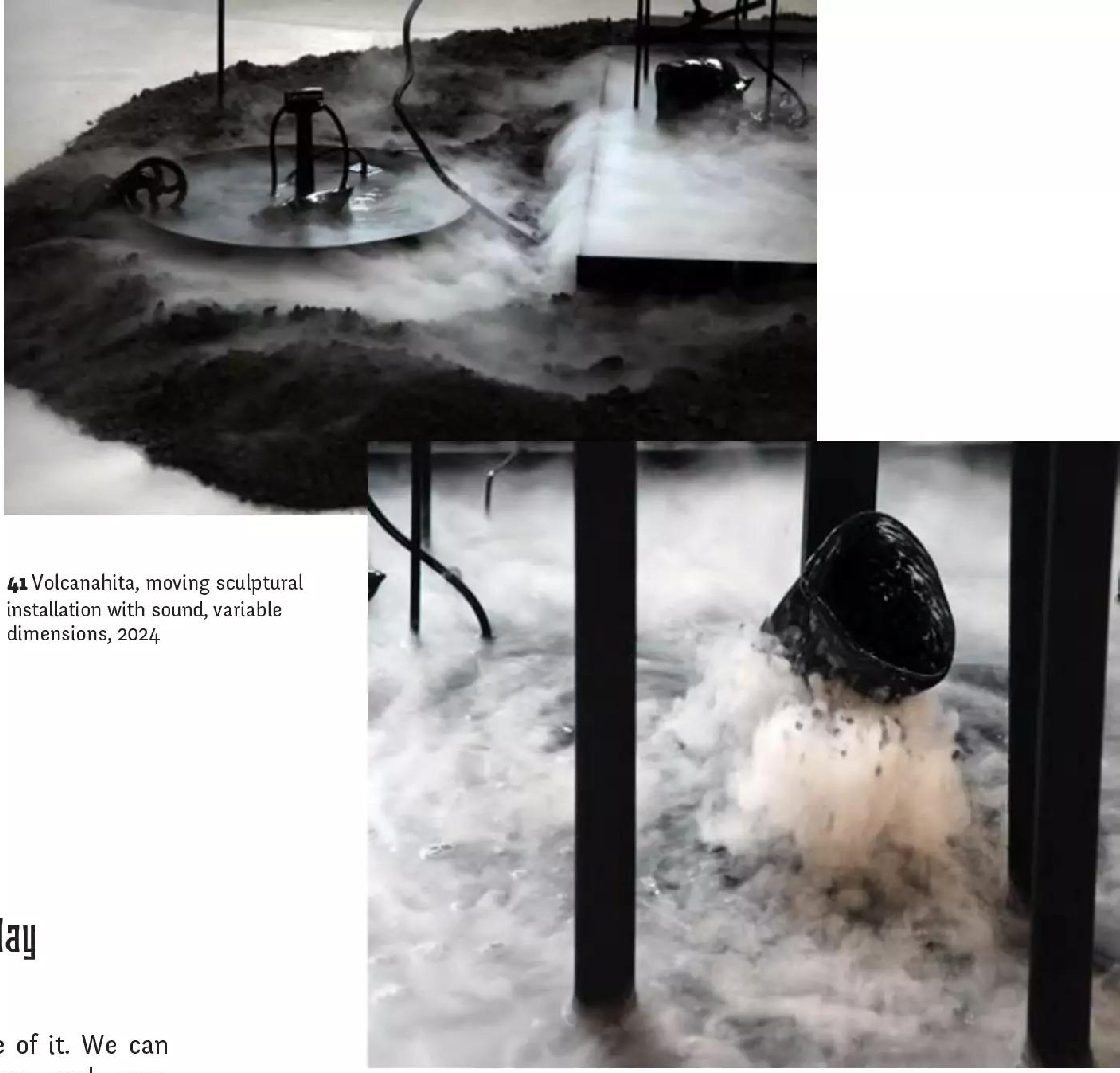
← **40** Volcanahita, moving sculptural installation with sound, variable dimensions, 2024

If you had to encapsulate your entire body of work in a single emotion, which would you choose?

If I had to encapsulate my entire body of work in a single emotion, it would be 'trouble/awakening/presence'.

Does 'trouble/awakening' create a thrill?

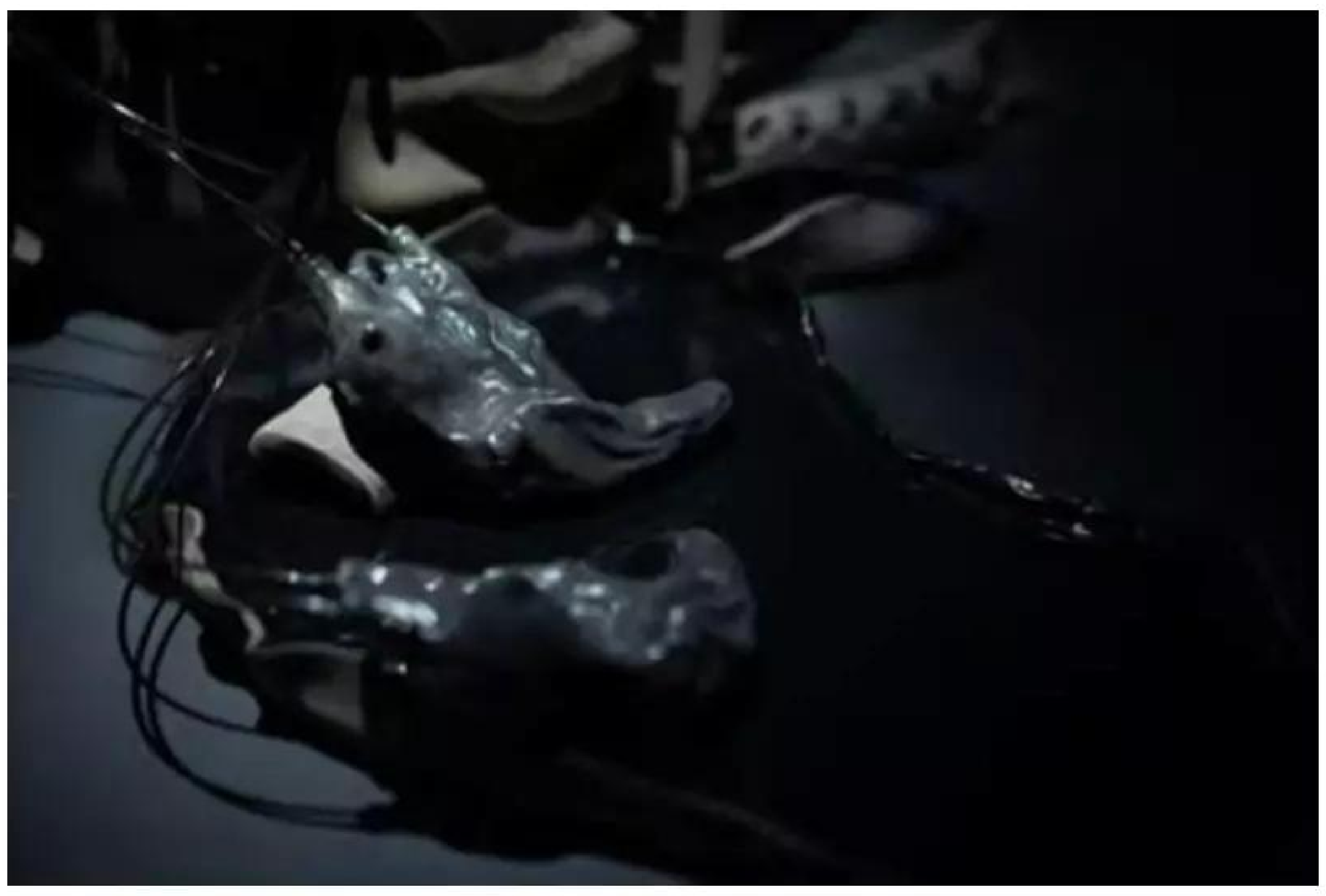
Yes. An emotion that runs through the body without warning. It arises in a breath, a disturbance, a tension between pleasure and the unknown. It is a sensation that is both intimate and universal, which does not pass through the mind, but through the skin, the nerves, the memory. This is exactly what I try to provoke in my work: a subtle, profound movement that touches without imposing, that disturbs without violence. My works are made to be felt before they are understood – like a vibration, a presence, an intensity. The thrill contains within it beauty, pain, desire, sometimes fear – everything that allows us to question ourselves afterwards...

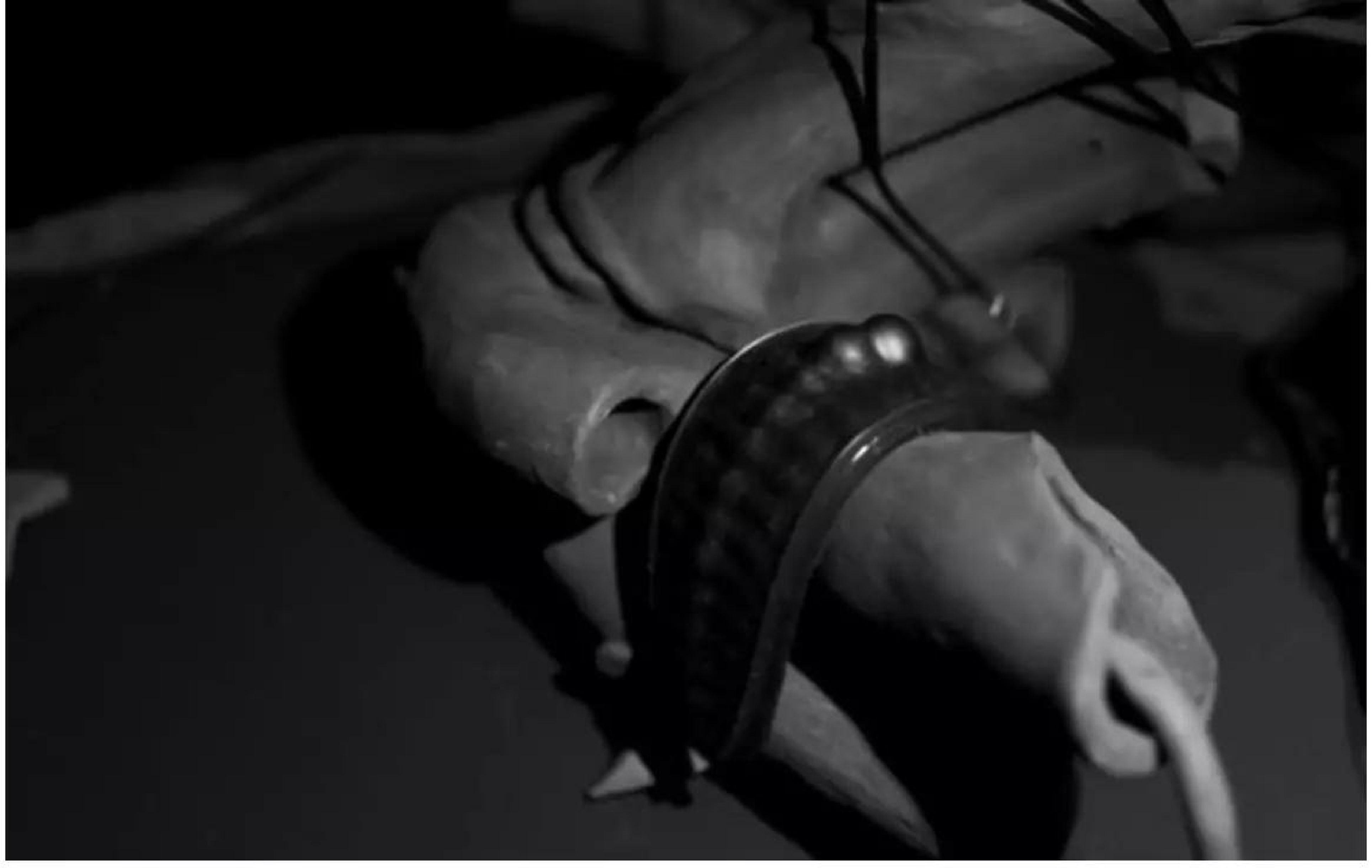


41 Volcanahita, moving sculptural installation with sound, variable dimensions, 2024

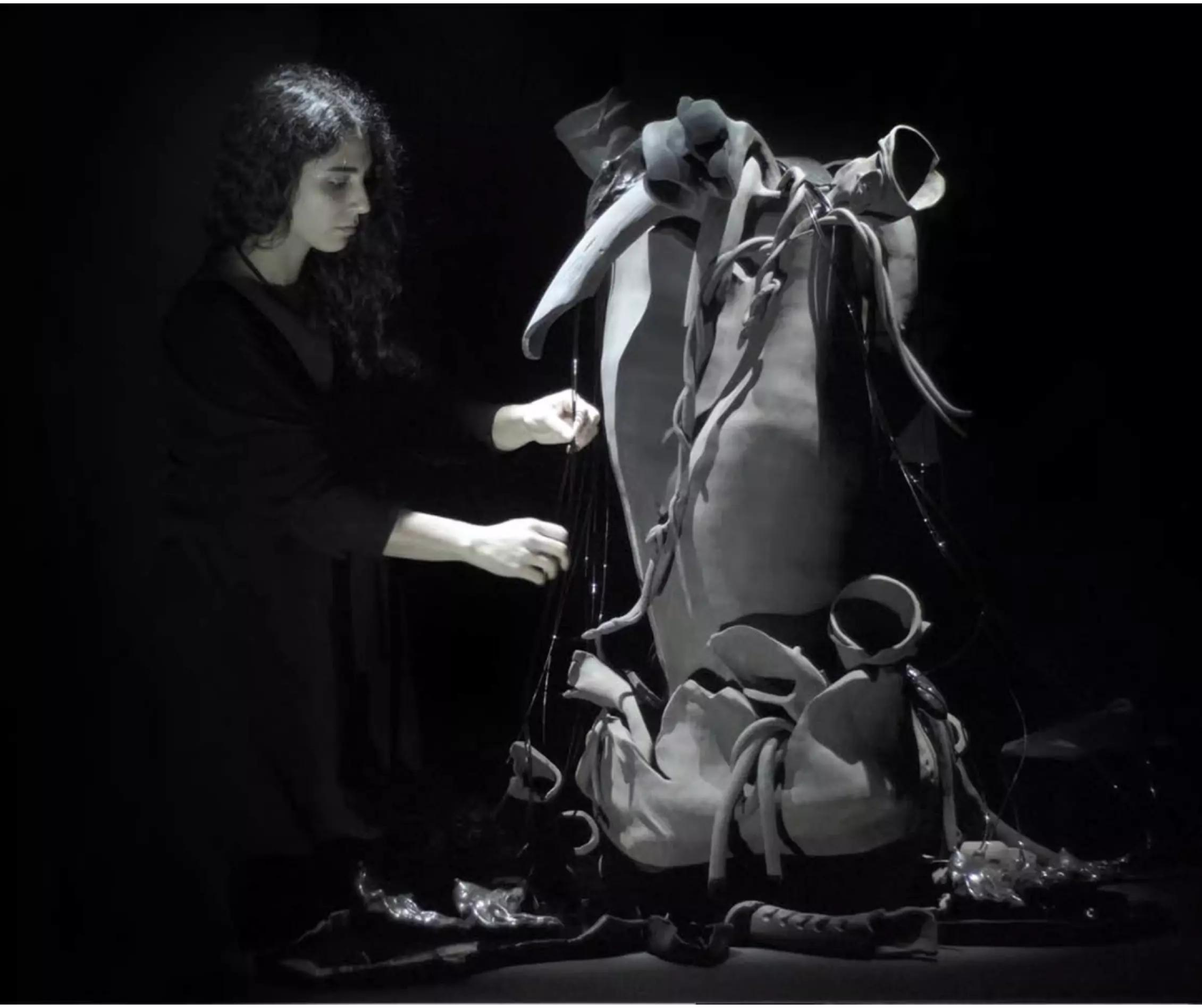
Do you think technology could one day become vulnerable, fragile, loving?

No, not in itself, but through the use we make of it. We can already see its effects in medicine, therapy, and even psychoanalysis, where it accompanies processes of care and healing. This also raises profound questions, particularly with regard to transhumanism: how far can we go in augmenting or transforming the body without losing something of our humanity? Technology can open up sensitive, human, poetic avenues... just as it can dehumanise if it is misdirected. It is not so much the machine that is at issue, but the intention, attention and awareness that we place in it.





42 L'Érosarbénus, sculptural installation, interactive, moving and sound, variable dimensions, 2020



Is there a work you haven't dared to create yet? Something too intimate, too raw?

When I first started practising, I set a lot of limits on what I dared to show. I would draw naked bodies, then erase them. There was a restraint, a filter – perhaps a fear of other people's gaze, or self-censorship inherited from my upbringing in Iran. Today, I feel freer, but I believe there are still boundaries, areas of fragility.

What is still holding you back or making you hesitate?

What I have not yet dared to create is not necessarily a naked body or an intimate form. It would be more of a work that would go to the limits of total vulnerability, without protection, without control. What interests me is not to shock or expose, but to provoke a disturbance, a tremor, an inner resonance. What I have not yet managed to do is perhaps to create without any fear. Not the fear of showing, but the fear of not knowing how to bring into existence what I feel deeply. The real question for me today is no longer "daring", but "how to realise and bring into existence what is invisible and untouchable, what is marvellous" - how to give form to what still eludes me.

What would you like visitors to feel when they leave your exhibition?

What I would like visitors to feel when they leave my exhibition is a mixture of beauty, questions and vertigo. Beauty, for me, is very subjective, but it has the power to awaken our deepest emotions and touch our innermost nature. It opens a door, a space for asking questions, for lifting the veil on a part of the world's truth. And then this vertigo, this sensation mixed with awakening and questioning, sets in – like a breath that stays with us long afterwards.

If your art had a smell, taste or temperature, what would they be?

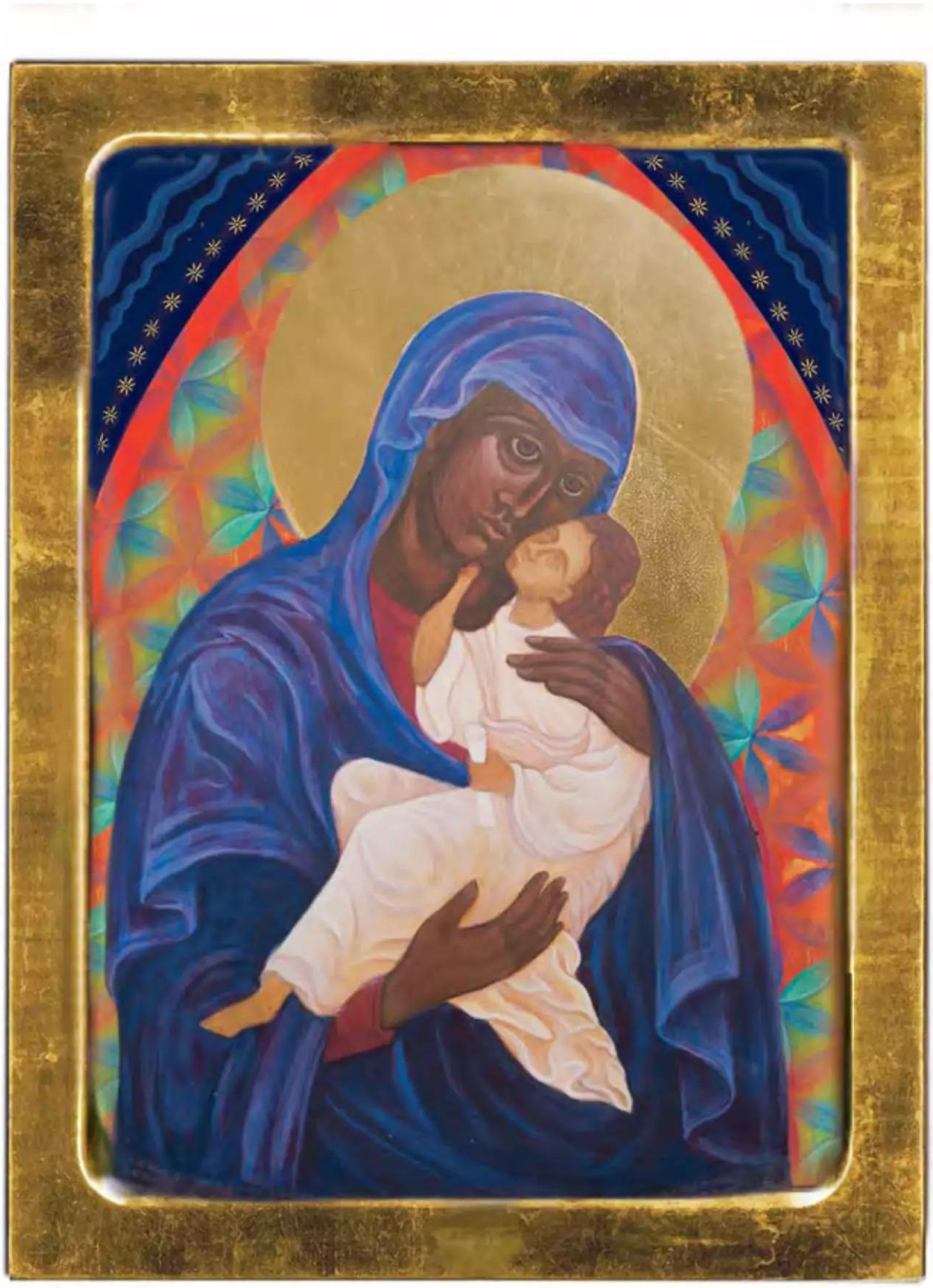
The scent of roses and the temperature of the human body: thrilling!

Marie Ménestrier and Emmanuel Reiatua Cuisinier

François Beauxis-Aussalet

Marie Ménestrier, a graduate of the Beaux-Arts in Lyon, has been an exhibition curator and director of the Abbaye of Maubuisson, a contemporary art site run by the Val-d'Oise departmental council, since 2018. She explores the relationships between heritage and contemporary creation through exhibitions that question narrative, between memory and transmission, archives and fiction. Keen to support the emerging scene, it also offers artist residencies a programme of cultural activities that are both demanding and innovative.

Emmanuel Reiatua Cuisinier is an exhibition curator, art writer and member of the French Association of Exhibition Curators. He is responsible for artistic production and residencies at Maubuisson Abbey, he designs exhibitions that explore the links between contemporary art, personal mythologies and collective narratives. He collaborates with numerous institutions in France and internationally, and oversees the publication of more than sixty books devoted to contemporary creation.



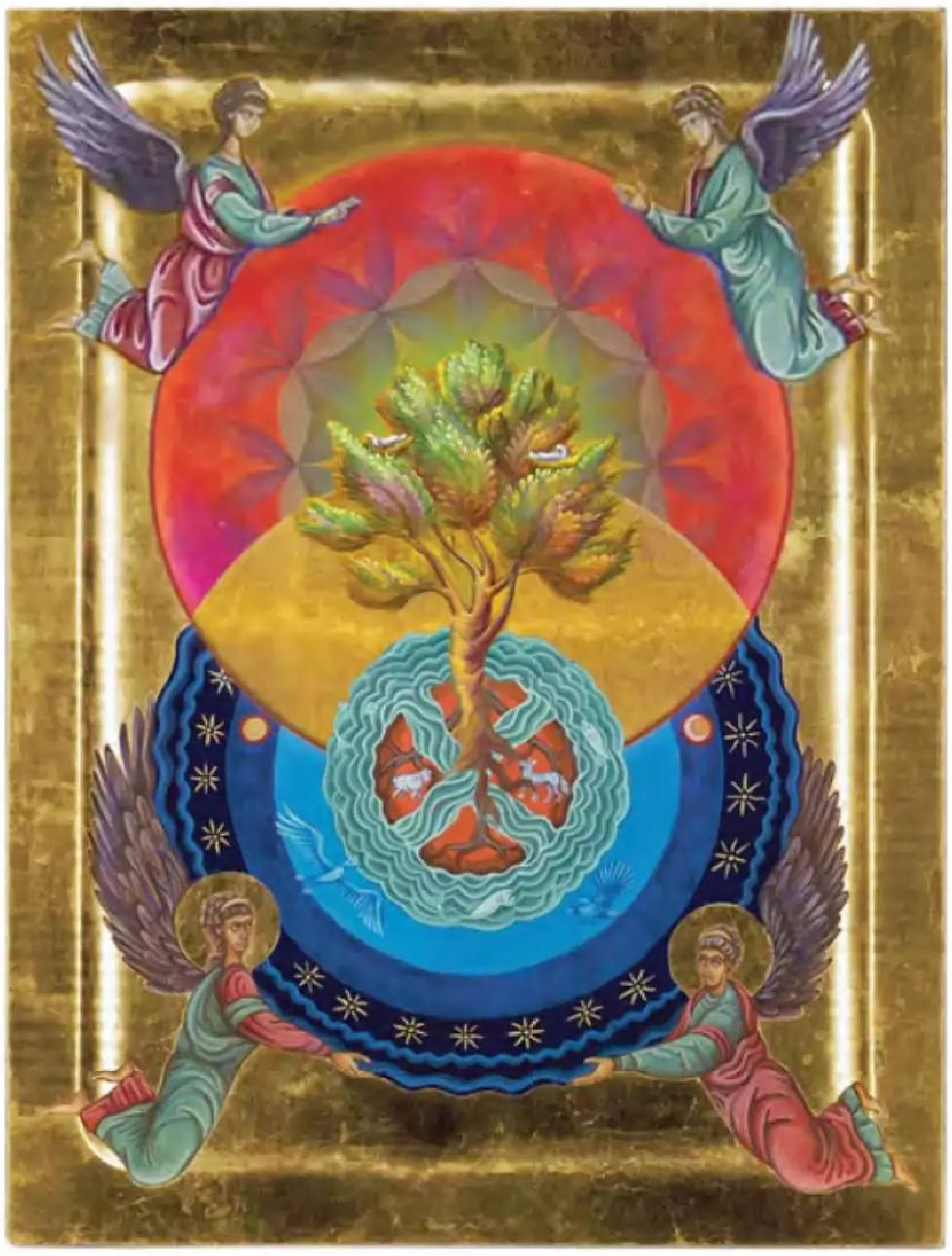
↑ **43** Gaylene Barnes, Material Mother and Cosmic Christ, egg tempera and mineral pigment with 23.5-carat gold leaf on 20 mm oak panel, 31 x 38 cm, 2018

Hello Marie Ménestrier and Emmanuel Reiatua Cuisinier. Thank you for agreeing to this joint interview with Argument magazine. You have worked on a series of exhibitions entitled "Les Métamorphoses du sacré" (The Metamorphoses of the Sacred), which opens on 4 October 2025 at Maubuisson Abbey, a contemporary art venue located in the Val d'Oise.

Could you introduce yourselves to each other? And perhaps, to illustrate your rapport, one of you could introduce the other, describing their passions, their role and how you complement each other in your approaches?

MM. After several collaborations in the past on various projects, we find ourselves today at Maubuis-son Abbey, continuing our shared history. This place, rich in resonance, offers us fertile ground for imagining new stories. I deeply appreciate the complicity and complementarity that bind us, both artistically and technically. Our artistic choices come naturally, driven by a shared and unequivocal vision.

ERC. We know each other from a previous professional life, and this long-standing relationship of trust remains, in my view, an essential foundation for our collaboration. It's a bit like we're picking up a conversation that started years ago. This gives rise to the complementarity that Marie mentions, which is expressed both in our way of thinking and in our view of the world. You operate on intuition, while I am more analytical, just as you are able to demonstrate pragmatism and synthesis.



Can you outline the main themes of the exhibition series "The Metamorphoses of the Sacred"?

^{e} MM. We find ourselves in a 13th-century Cistercian abbey, a place once inhabited by a community of women where the sacred permeated every gesture, every silence. A profound spirituality flourished there, nourished by prayer, devotion and contemplation. What interests us here is to examine the resonance between the gestures associated with this spirituality and those of the creative act. For in every act of creation, it seems to me, there is a form of sacredness. There is a real porosity between these two dimensions, a subtle shift that we wanted to explore.

ERC. When you shared this initial thought with me, it seemed necessary to broaden the theme of the sacred even further, so as not to reduce women's bodies to an essentialist view. While the notion of the sacred feminine may be an interesting starting point, it needs to be quickly moved beyond. It was therefore natural for us to broaden our field of exploration to include the question of gender, not as a fundamental subject, but as a way of moving beyond traditional divisions and normative representations. Ultimately, we wish to return to the essence of the sacred, to question it in both its historical and contemporary dimensions. The aim is to understand its transformations, its symbolic shifts and its metamorphoses through the ages, hence the choice of the generic title "The Metamorphoses of the Sacred".

MM. This project is therefore an attempt at sensitive interpretation, which we are presenting in the form of a triptych of exhibitions, running until 2027.

← **44** Gaylene Barnes, Source and the Manifest Mandorla, egg tempera and mineral pigment with 23.5-carat gold leaf on 20 mm oak panel, 33 x 42 cm, 2024

45 Maubuisson Abbey ↓

Le Cha pitre

46 Armelle de Sainte Marie, Les Petites Concrétions rouges ou lingas VII (The Little Red Concretions or Lingas VII), oil on paper, 34 x 19 cm, 2004 →

What goals are you seeking to achieve for the public and for artists?

ERC. I like to describe my job as that of a vertical storyteller. This thematic exhibition offers the opportunity to bring together a diversity of perspectives and sensibilities, giving rise to new narratives. This plurality nourishes artistic practices by opening them up to a multiplicity of interpretations, giving rise to sometimes unexpected resonances between works, which convey new and often surprising meanings.

The Abbey of Maubuisson is the starting point for our work, which is inspired by its history, symbols and expertise. We seek to convey this heritage in a unique and innovative way, rethinking the forms of address and exhibition methods to encourage encounters between the works and the public. This approach is part of a desire to defend contemporary creation, addressing both novice and knowledgeable audiences within a territory on different scales.

What aspects of your respective backgrounds led you to take an interest in the concept of the sacred and to want to explore it within the Abbey of Maubuisson?

MM. As far as I am concerned, my approach is above all instinctive, deeply rooted in the sensitive geography and DNA of the place. It takes as its starting point a careful reading of its history: that of a space for living and contemplation, carried by a community of women whose trajectory dates back to the 13e th century.

ERC. I have always been fascinated by words, what they evoke and, above all, how their meaning evolves over time. This reflection naturally led me to the notion of the sacred, which manifests itself through gestures, representations and symbols. It creates common languages that can emancipate thought and open up deeper levels of interpretation. Behind the object, there is always a second meaning, often unexplored, which reveals its full significance. Today, it is possible to reconfigure communities around renewed symbols.

You want to go beyond the simple sacred/profane duality and bring together different disciplines, cultures and eras: in concrete terms, how does this translate into the formats and mechanisms you have put in place?

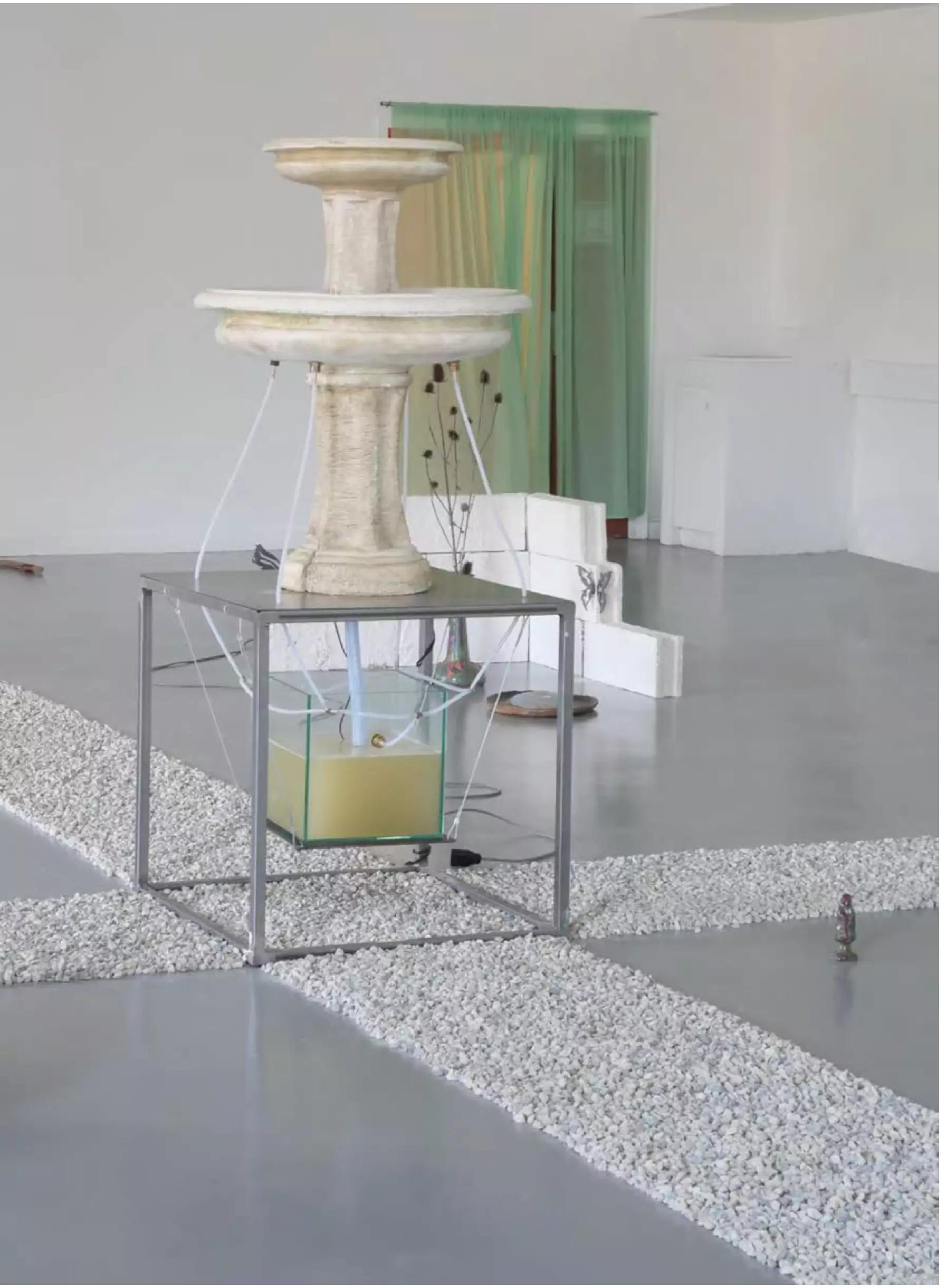
MM. This is not an approach rooted in a scientific or historical perspective. It does not aim for fragmented reflection, in the manner of an encyclopaedia, but rather tends towards a point of convergence, capable of bringing out mental resonances, synchronicities and encounters that are as eclectic as they are unexpected.

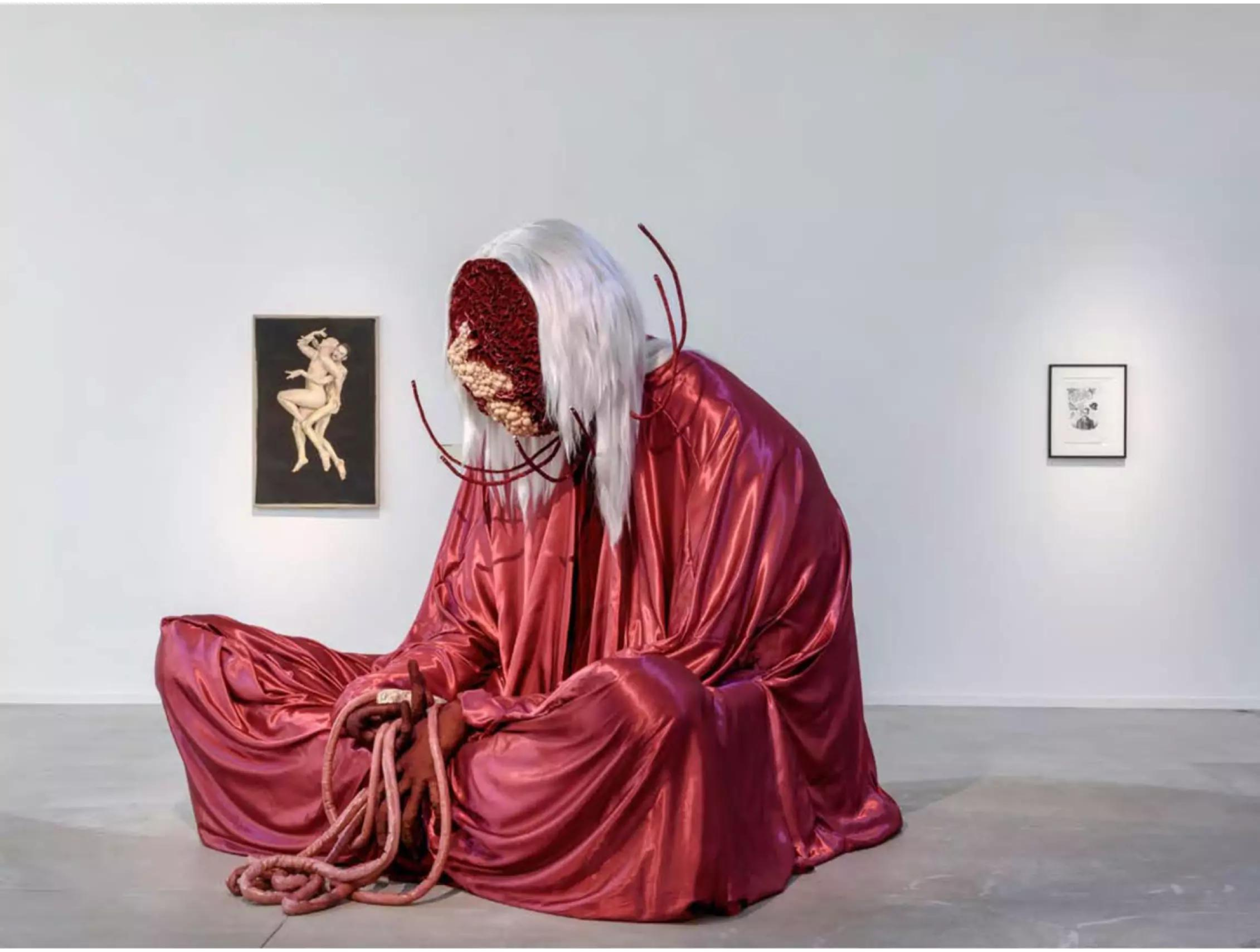
ERC. We wish to explore the boundaries of the sacred: when can we truly speak of the sacred? Where are its limits? How can we experience it, feel its resistance and grasp its contours? These boundaries are shifting, flexible, sometimes symbolic, sometimes concrete, and vary according to context. The perception of the sacred is constructed more through sensory, cultural, social and spiritual experiences, revealing the complexity of the links between humans, the sacred and the divine. Our approach is resolutely cross-disciplinary, bringing together cultures, ritual practices and historical periods, as well as artistic, social and even sporting disciplines! The sacred is not confined to established religious traditions; it can arise in the most unexpected places, embodied in objects, gestures, words or shared moments. It emerges within diverse communities, whenever something transcends the ordinary and opens a window onto the realm of the senses.

VII
Ad Sm 2004

47 Chloé Viton, Hematie, The Birth of Oni Baba, fabric, latex, resin, synthetic hair, funori seaweed, wood, 200 x 200 x 200 cm, 2023 →

48 L. Camus-Govoroff, OpenSource*, installation, steel, glass, plaster, stone, PVC piping, pump, 2020-2021 ↓





Each part of the triptych must "resonate" from one exhibition to the next: can you illustrate this point using some of the artists on display?

Firstly, in terms of form, several artists appear in different sections of the triptych, thus establishing visual correspondences between them. Iranian visual artist Yosra Mojtahedi, to whom you devote an entire interview, is a striking example. Featured in the first collective section, "Mandorla, the metamorphoses of the sacred," she returns in the second, "Transmutations: the flow of flesh.", in a format similar to a monograph. She invites three artists to compare their practices with her own universe, creating a rich and open dialogue.

On a more substantive note, and to give you a glimpse of the first section, which will open next October, New Zealand artist Gaylene Barnes explores the symbolic figure of the mandorla in medieval Christian iconography. She diverts its traditional use – glorifying a holy figure – to highlight a tree. In her work entitled Mandorla, she evokes the original garden or the symbol of knowledge, restoring the tree's sacred value in resonance with contemporary issues of ecology and the preservation of life. For her part, L. Camus-Govorroff draws on interspecies relationships, ancestral knowledge related to plants and our connection to the sacred. The artist presents a symbolic fountain entitled OpenSource*, conceived as a space for life, regeneration and joy. Infused with a plant-based decoction with contraceptive properties, this work becomes a place of female emancipation, based on knowledge that has long been marginalised or forgotten.

Chloé Viton, who will perform on the opening day, extends her installation Hématie, the Birth of Oni Baba by presenting a red character inspired by the mythical Japanese figure of Oni Baba. This witch, disguised as an old woman to better trap her victims, also symbolises the resistance of a powerful woman in the face of a patriarchal order. In this work, flesh becomes a vehicle for transmission : cellular memory and folk rituals intertwine, making the body both the repository of an ancestral message and the mirror of the artist herself.

↑ **49** Chloé Viton, Hematie, the Birth of Oni Baba, fabric, latex, resin, synthetic hair, funori seaweed, wood, 200 x 200 x 200 cm, 2023

50 Armelle de Sainte Marie, Scène de source (hommage à Athanasius Kircher), graphite on paper, 65 x 50 cm, 2012 →

ERC. For the exhibition poster, we chose Armelle de Sainte Marie, who presents a graphite drawing entitled Scène de source (Scene from a Spring) (tribute to Athanasius Kircher). This work brings together geological motifs inspired by representations of the Earth's crust made by the Baroque Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher, based at the time on illustrated hypotheses. Its composition, reminiscent of a theatrical set, unfolds an imaginary landscape of cavities, springs and invented reliefs, celebrating the vitality and beauty of a fertile and providential earth.

To conclude: what mark would you like to leave behind from this series of exhibitions in this place steeped in spirituality and history?

MM. I want to offer our visitors a deeply emotional experience that will leave a lasting impression and awaken a genuine sensitivity. I want the exhibition, in dialogue with the evocative power of the place, to capture them completely, until the unique magic of the abbey works its spell.

ERC. For my part, I hope that this setting will remain a space open to contemporary thinking, in tune with the changes in our societies and attentive to the concerns of current generations. A place rooted in memory, but resolutely turned towards the future and the exploration of new horizons.

"Mandorla, the metamorphoses of the

sacred" Group exhibition

With Gaylene Barnes, Lara Blanchard, Hildegarde de Bingen, L. Camus-Govoroff, Alexandra Duprez, Charles Fréger, Annabelle Guetatra, Balthazar Heisch, Lauren Januhowski, Kate MccGwire, Rachel Labastie, Yosra Mojtahedi, Armelle de Sainte Marie, peggy.m & Scarlett Owls, Chloé Viton.

Co-curators: Marie Ménestrier and
Emmanuel Reiatua Cuisinier

5 October 2025 – 8 March

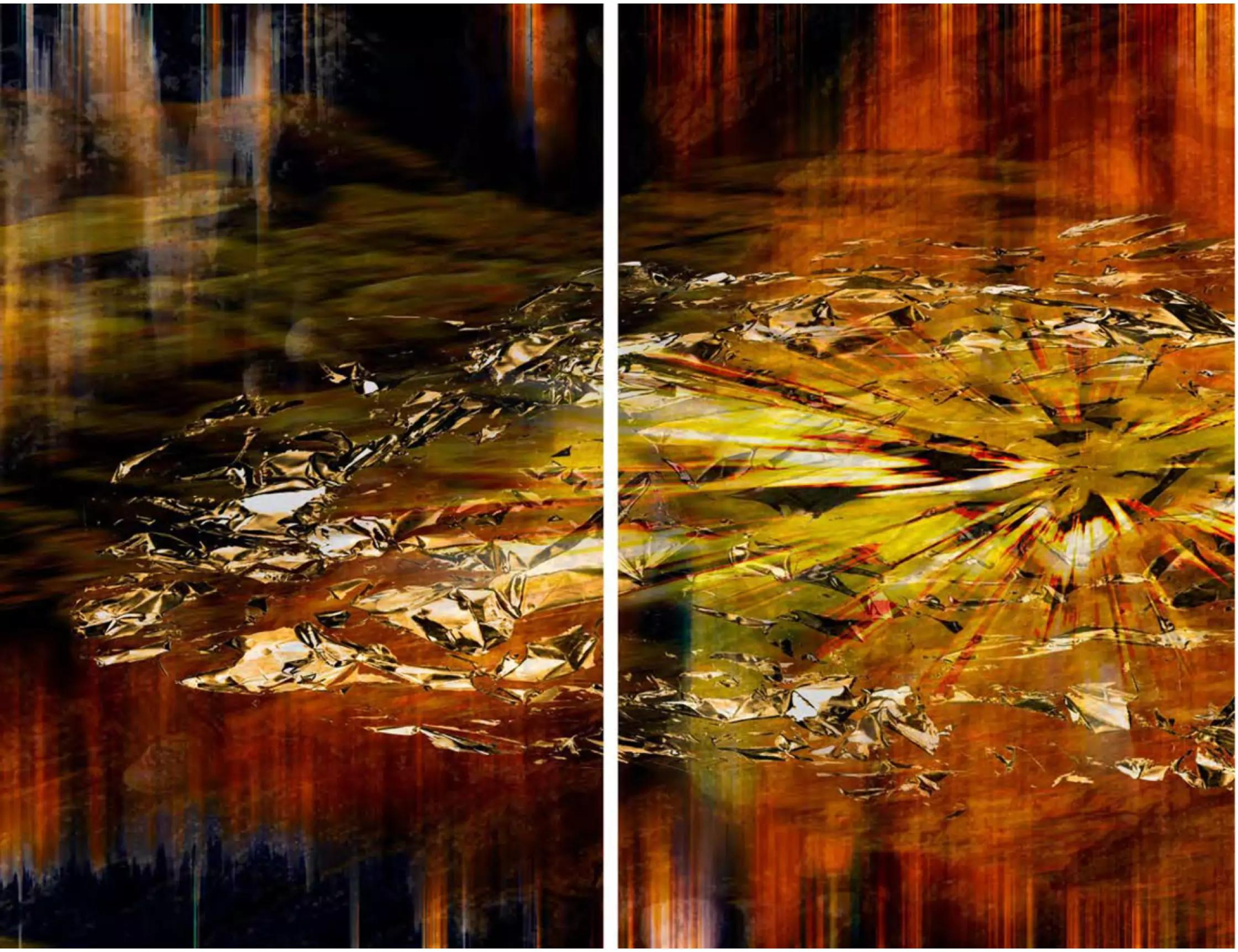
2026 Maubuisson Abbey

Jean-Luc Labrette

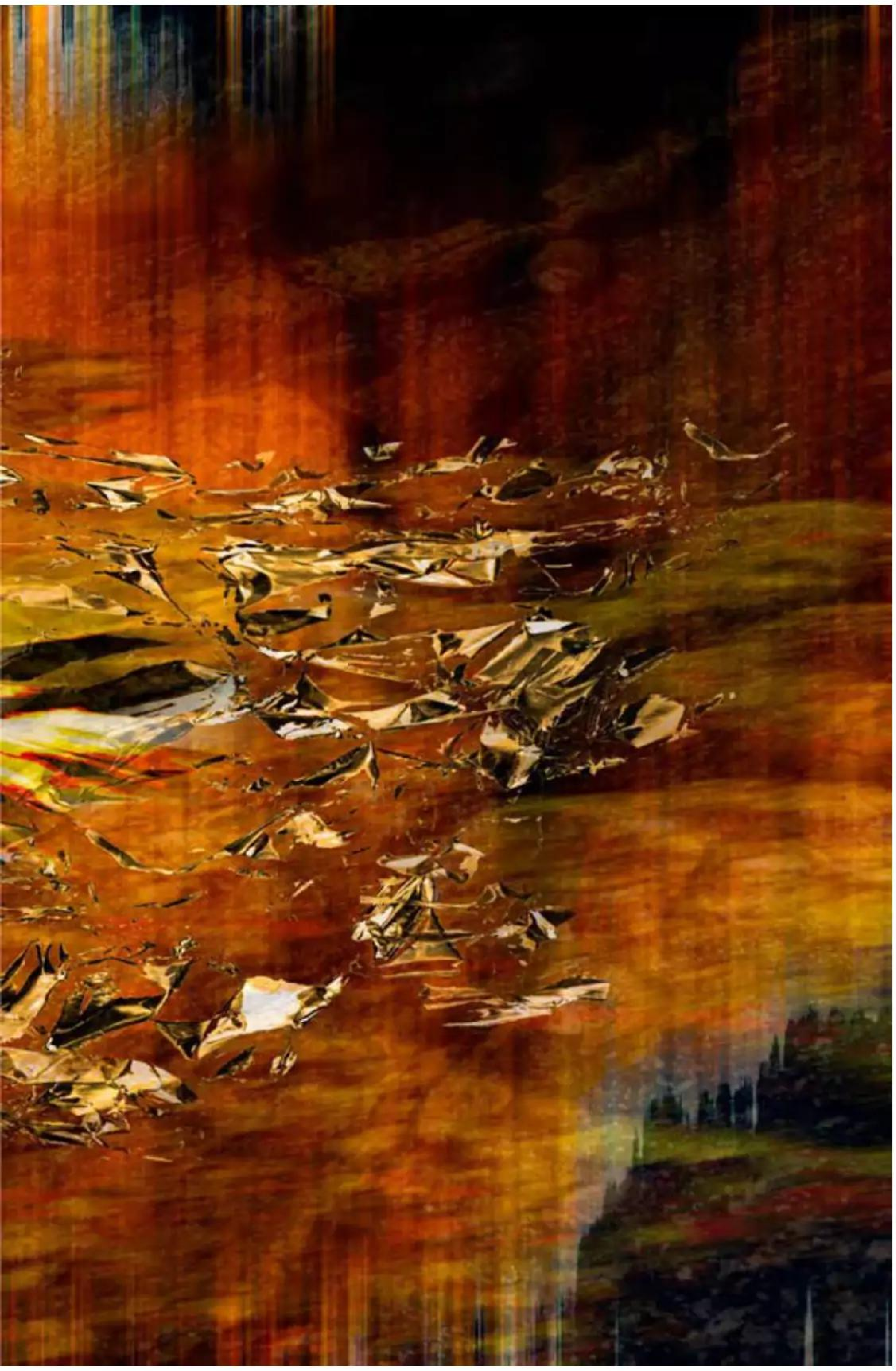
By Michèle Beauxis

Jean-Luc Labrette was born in 1954 in Orléans (Loiret) and has lived in Sarthe since the age of 23. It was a secondary school teacher, who was also a painter, who enabled him to enter the world of art. At around the age of 12, he had already developed a taste for painting and gained some experience thanks to the mother of a friend. He left secondary school at the end of his second year. and enrolled at the Brassart school in Tours. There he trained as a graphic designer specialising in advertising and visual communication. At a time when everything was done by hand, this also involved many subjects, such as the study of composition, art history, etc. A teacher would get help after class to create a hand-drawn cartoon... As with painting, Jean-Luc Labrette taught himself photography, starting in 1983. The advent of digital technology has enabled him to find new possibilities for expression in photography, while remaining faithful to his earliest experiences.

51 Self-portrait, in the background, partial view of De Materia 58, photographic art, 80 x 120 cm, 2022 →



↑ **52** Apocalypse, photography, printed on
Dibond, triptych, 120 x 60 cm, 2025



Jean-Luc Labrette, whose work I have been following for several years through his Instagram posts, opens the door to his studio in Saint-Ouen-de-Mimbré, a village on the outskirts of Fresnay-sur-Sarthe, a charming medieval town on the border between the Pays de Loire and Normandy regions. I thought I was going to meet a photographer. He introduces himself as a visual artist... I discover a bright, contemporary building, a studio designed in a way that immediately reminds me of the calligraphers' studios in Taiwan, with a cosy corner at the entrance where you can get to know each other over a drink, large white walls hung with series of works, various workbenches with just the right amount of apparent disorder of artists' materials, tools, works in progress... Stacks of works, no doubt old ones, invite you to rummage through and explore Jean-Luc Labrette's production. A steep staircase leads up to a more secret space...

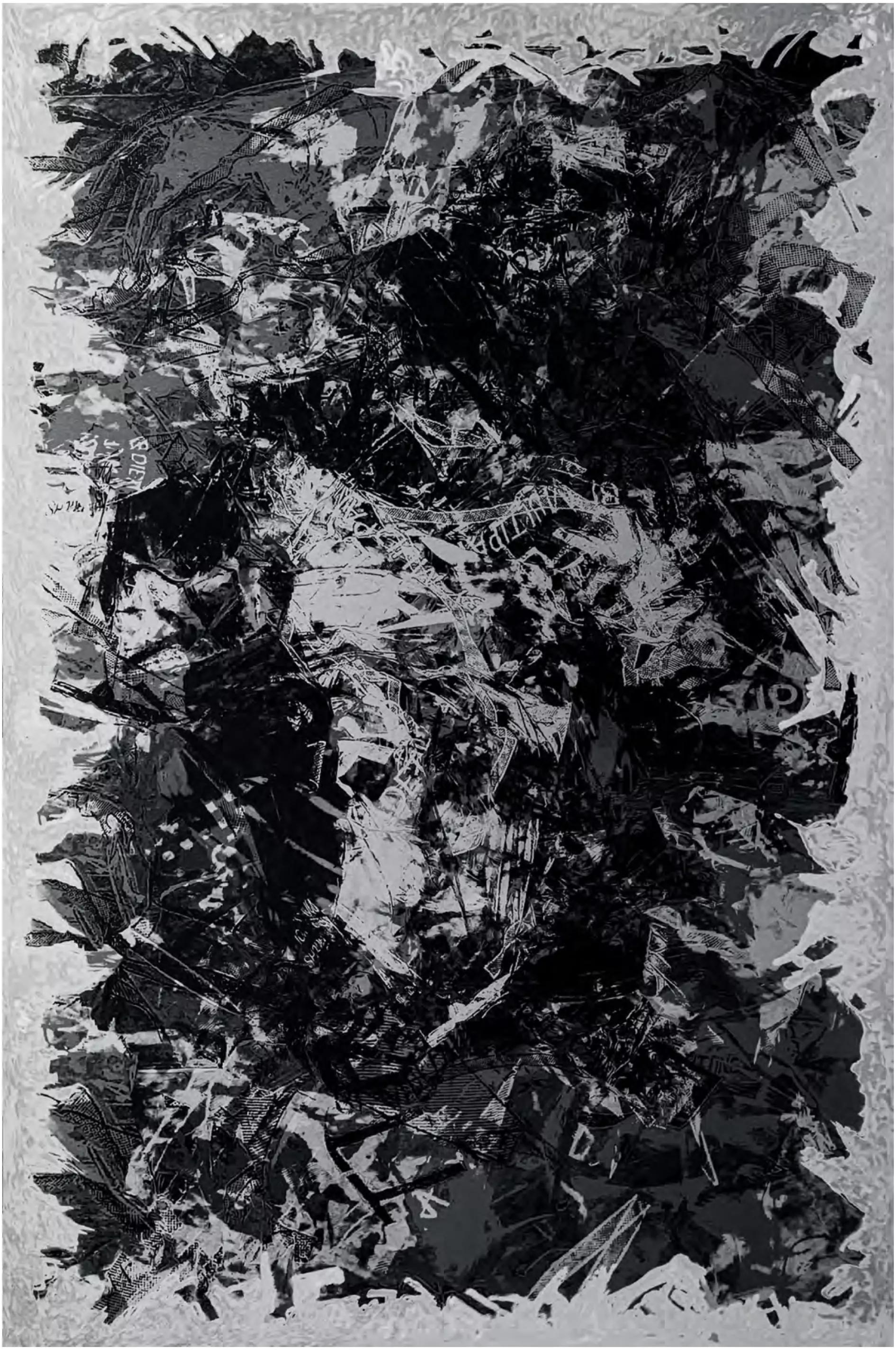
Here, hanging on your walls, is a series of large-format works, a suite entitled "Apocalypse". Did this title come to you straight away, like a programme or a research project, or did it come to mind at the end, as something that summed up your work appropriately?

Although the idea of tackling this subject came to me a long time ago, the theme of the Apocalypse has undoubtedly imposed itself on me recently in light of current world events.

Discovering this predominantly dark exhibition, with one notable exception, provokes a strong emotion, a shock. Is it possible for you to reveal the genesis of these apocalyptic pages, which are teeming with details when you get close and scrutinise them?

This ongoing series refers to the 14th-century Apocalypse tapestry and its 20th-century counterpart, Jean Lurçat's Le Chant du Monde, both on display in Angers.

Black has long been a constant and essential component of my work. It is obviously present in the Apocalypse series and contributes to the sombre atmosphere of these images, which deal with a subject that is, all things considered, not very cheerful. On closer inspection, incomprehensible letters or speech bubbles appear to symbolise the end of the Word among dislocated human torsos. A face can also be seen, as if irradiated by radioactivity. It is true that, for the moment, I am dealing more with the final phase of humanity in these images entitled Disintegration or The End of the Word, but I still hope that one day I will return to more optimistic images, as Lurçat did in the last tapestries of his "Chant du Monde". History will tell.



← **53** Apocalypse – Disintegration I,
photographic print, printed on brushed
aluminium, sanded, 50 x 75 cm, 2024

Another series, "De Materia", meaning "On Matter", is intriguing: for you, does it refer to the matter of natural objects or the very matter you work with?

It is a work that focuses both on the photographed subject and the photographic material itself.
During my random walks, I find most of my
"raw materials" such as rocks, bark, reflections on water, etc. These natural elements can be complemented by plastic film, crumpled aluminium foil, rusty scrap metal, etc.
Then, the creative work on the computer begins: transformation, even transfiguration, of the photographed materials, superimposition through transparency, removal of certain parts, colour modification, distortion... After printing on Dibond or aluminium, and when the artistic need arises, I sometimes manually intervene on the print by engraving, sanding or adding paint highlights.
We can refer to this as fine art photography.

Where does your passion for photography and your work as a photographer come from?

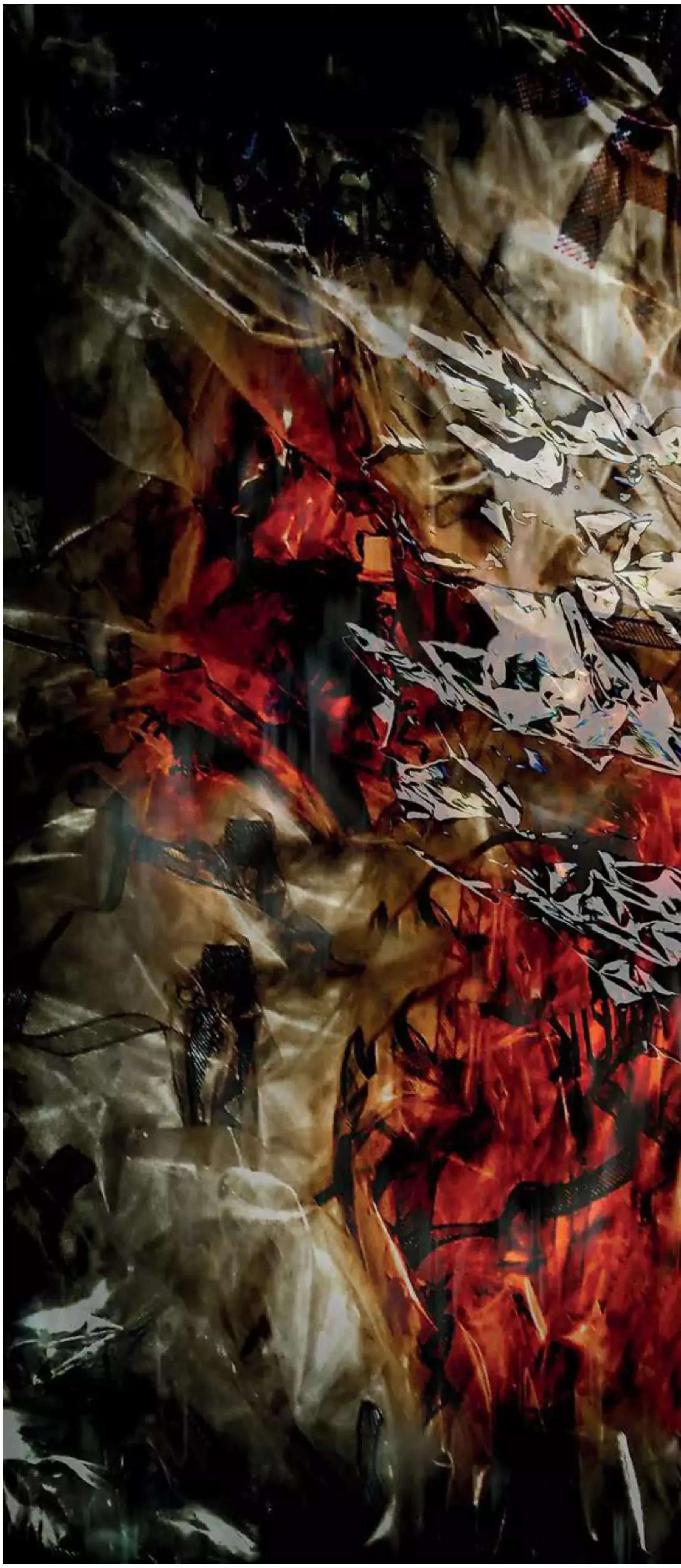
My first steps in photography date back to when I was 12 years old and was given a small 24 x 36 camera. This allowed me to start learning how to take photographs on my own.
But this budding passion was quickly curbed by a lack of pocket money to buy film and pay for its development. At the same time, a decisive encounter changed everything: meeting the mother of a friend who inspired me to paint.
Then began a long period of self-taught painting – my parents had given me a box of oil paints – as well as art history, which I believe is inseparable from the practice. In 1980, my long-buried desire to take photographs resurfaced, and once again I taught myself, while continuing to paint. Ten years ago, my desire to paint disappeared, and I devoted myself exclusively to photography. The advent of digital technology has revolutionised my practice and allowed me to explore another dimension of photography thanks to the countless possibilities offered by computers. From being a photographer when taking pictures, I become a graphic designer in front of the computer screen.

As a photographer, what are your favourite places and subjects?

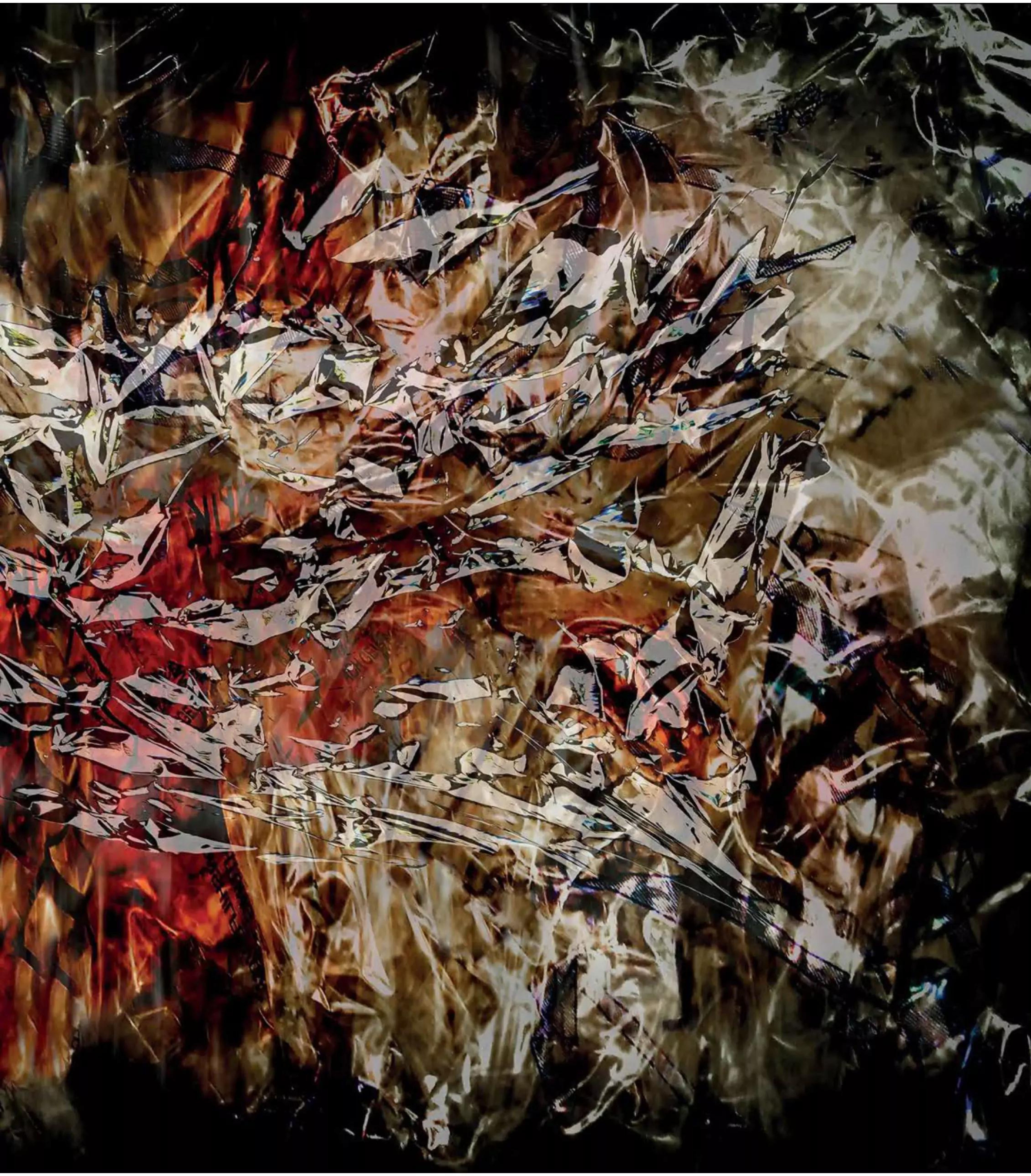
I have often told my students that you don't have to go far from home to take interesting photos. Our garden can be a treasure trove of images.
Nevertheless, I am particularly fond of a place in Brittany where extraordinary rocks provide me with a wide variety of materials for my work.
I have actually started a series on this subject. That said, I don't stop myself from photographing other subjects, just for fun, such as landscapes in a particular light, unusual places, etc.

The places and subjects you photograph, which you capture through your personal gaze (no doubt using very specific equipment?), are impossible to identify in your works. Is this a deliberate choice to mislead the viewer, to make them ask questions? And, for that matter, do you think about the future viewer when you create?

My initial shots are, for me, merely "raw material" intended, after digital processing, for the creation of images, like paint coming out of a tube that changes appearance depending on how the painter uses it. My very first painting, which I treasure, is an abstract composition... Since then, abstraction has always been at the heart of my research in both painting and photography, because for me it has as much expressive power as figurative art. Any abstract work, detached from reality, raises questions at first glance and eventually leads to contemplation, depending on the viewer's open-mindedness and sensitivity.
"viewer", which I leave entirely open to interpretation. It's paradoxical, but my influences come mainly from painting rather than photography, with abstract painters such as De Kooning, Pollock, Rothko and Soulages.



54 Apocalypse – Disintegration II, photographic print on Dibond, 60 x 80 cm, 2024 ↓

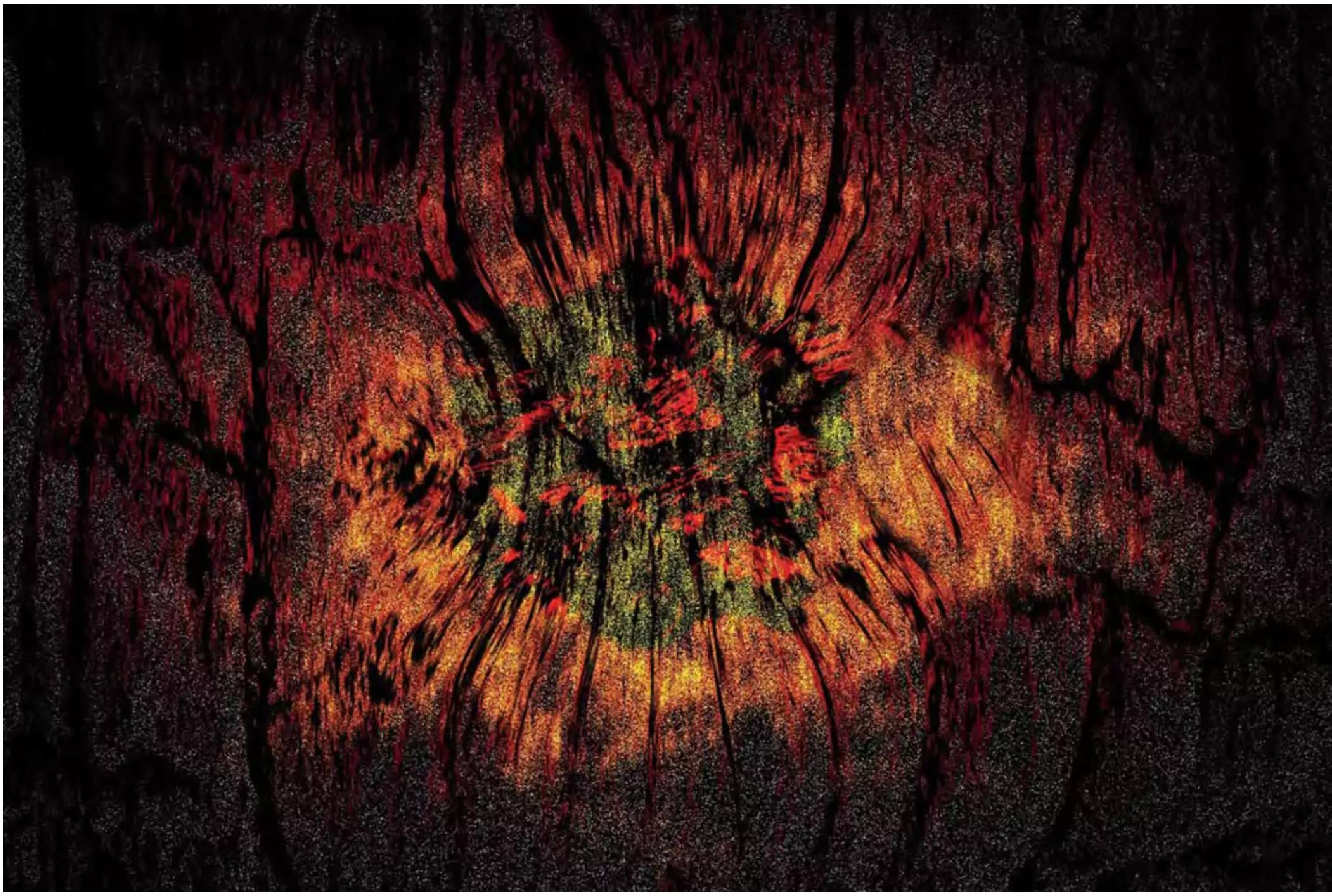


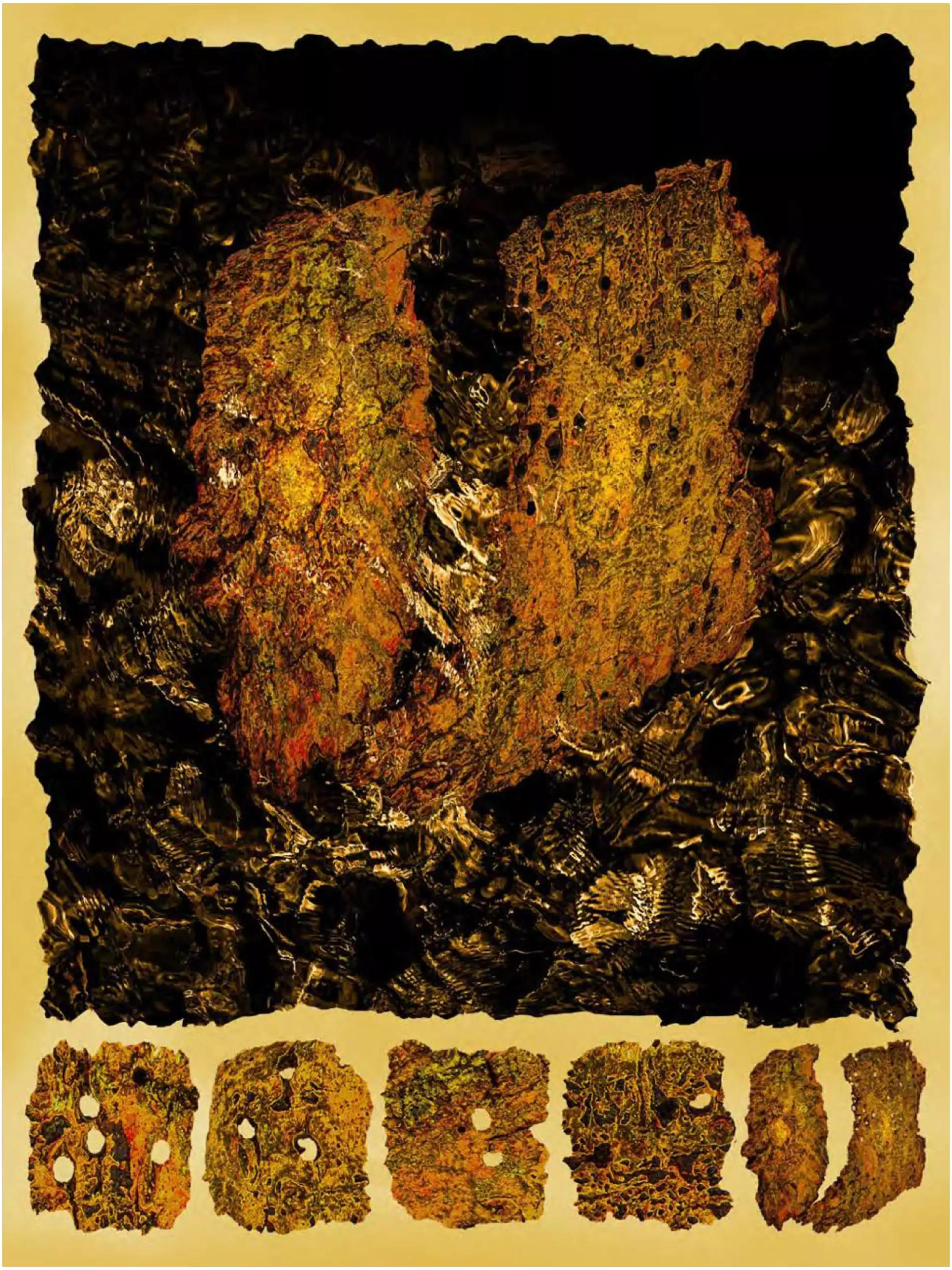
What value do you place on colour, which seems to be rather rare in your works?

Like many photographers, I work in black and white. In fact, the first images in the "De Materia" series, which were exhibited at the L'arTmature gallery, are almost exclusively in black and white, with a good proportion of black – isn't black a colour? However, artistic necessity increasingly leads me to introduce colour, as if to make some of my creations "sing".

This summer, in 2025, you are exhibiting with another artist, a photographer, at "2". Is it important, or even stimulating, to exhibit with other artists?

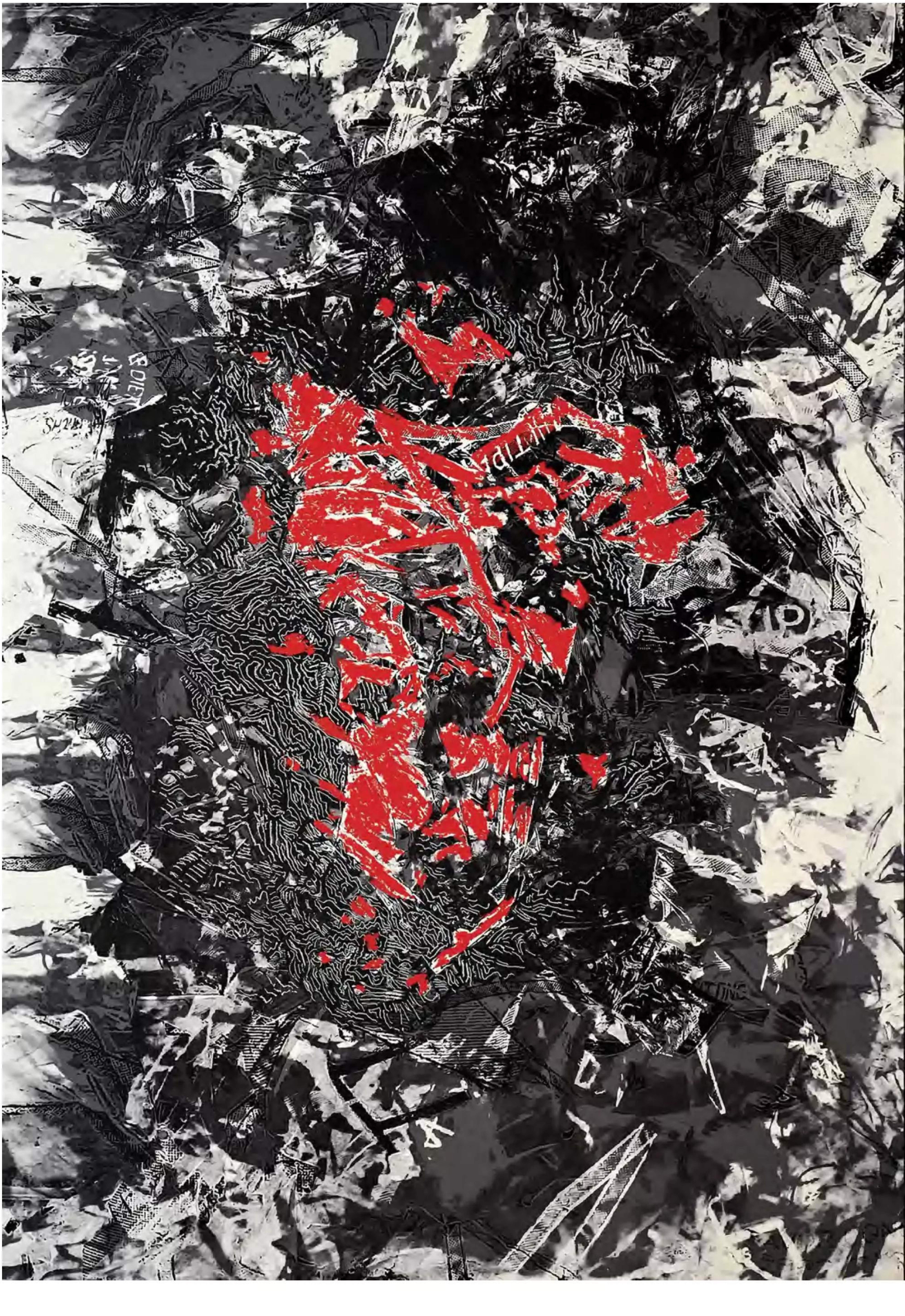
I thought it might be interesting to present two different approaches to contemporary photography to the public: Georges Quéméner's analogue photography and my digital photography. We also have something in common: our work with photographic material.





← **55** Apocalypse – Infernal Fires, photographic print on brushed gold aluminium, 40 x 60 cm, 2025

↑ **56** Apocalypse – The End of Time, photographic art, print on brushed gold aluminium, 60 x 80 cm, 2025

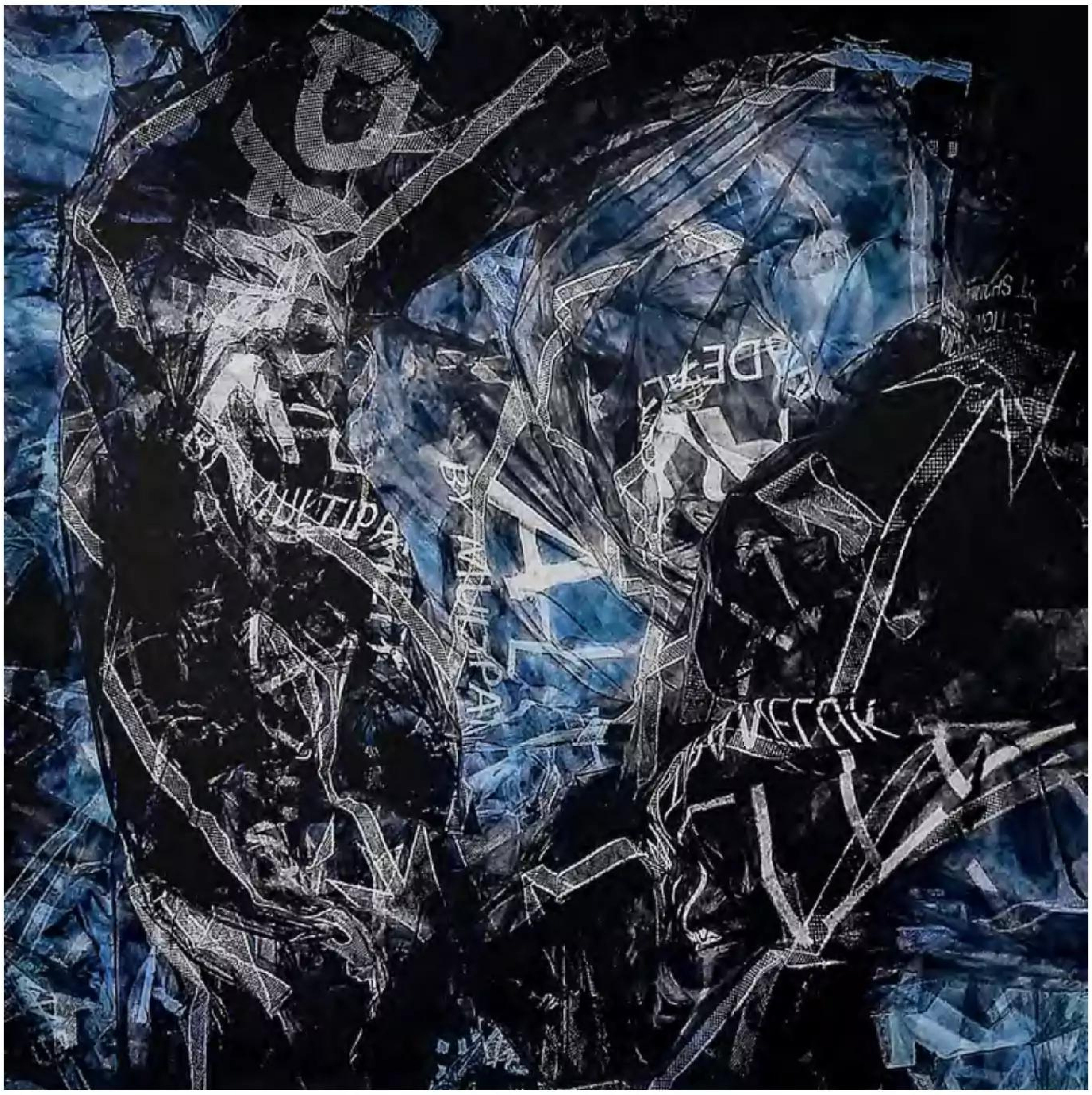


Contemplating your ongoing series, in any case, with "Le Baroque revisité", viewers do not feel lost amid all the novelty. They can recognise, or tell themselves that they could recognise if they were cultured enough, characters from famous old paintings, who seem to have happily stepped out of a work by Jean-Luc Labrette. Would you like to tell us about this series?

I would prefer not to discuss this series at this time until I have resolved the issue of the rights to use the source images, as I will not use them without the permission of their authors or their rights holders.

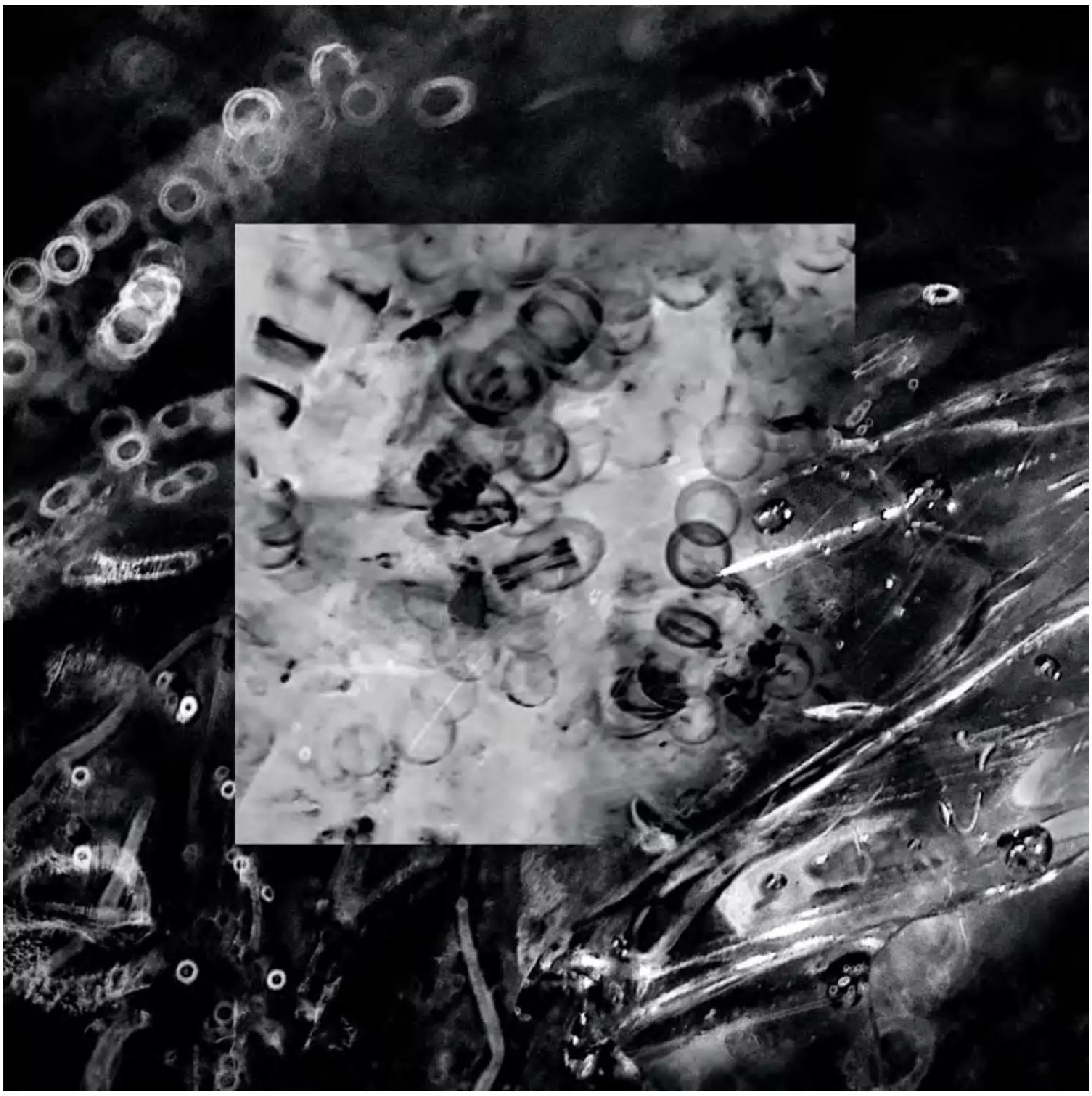
Do you always work in series?

Yes! I currently have four series in progress, but as my creative process is based on improvisation, the image will only find its place in a series during its creation.



57 Apocalypse – The End of the Word, photographic art, printed on Dibond, painted highlights, 50 x 50 cm, 2024 →

←58 Apocalypse – The Sixth Trumpet, photographic art, printed on Dibond, painted highlights, engraving, 50 x 70 cm, 2024



You certify that your works are created without the use of artificial intelligence. Why is this taboo?

What I object to about generative AI is the fact that it can use images or parts of images "mined" from the internet, for which their authors will not receive any royalties. As a member of ADAGP, I am strongly opposed to this practice.
For my part, I work with my own photographs. Moreover, the same problems arise for music, cinema, literature, and even sculpture, thanks to 3D printers. Any unscrupulous "creator" lacking in skill can produce works of which, ultimately, they will be nothing more than a minor co-author.

You currently have a work in progress. I would be curious to know the stages of its creation!

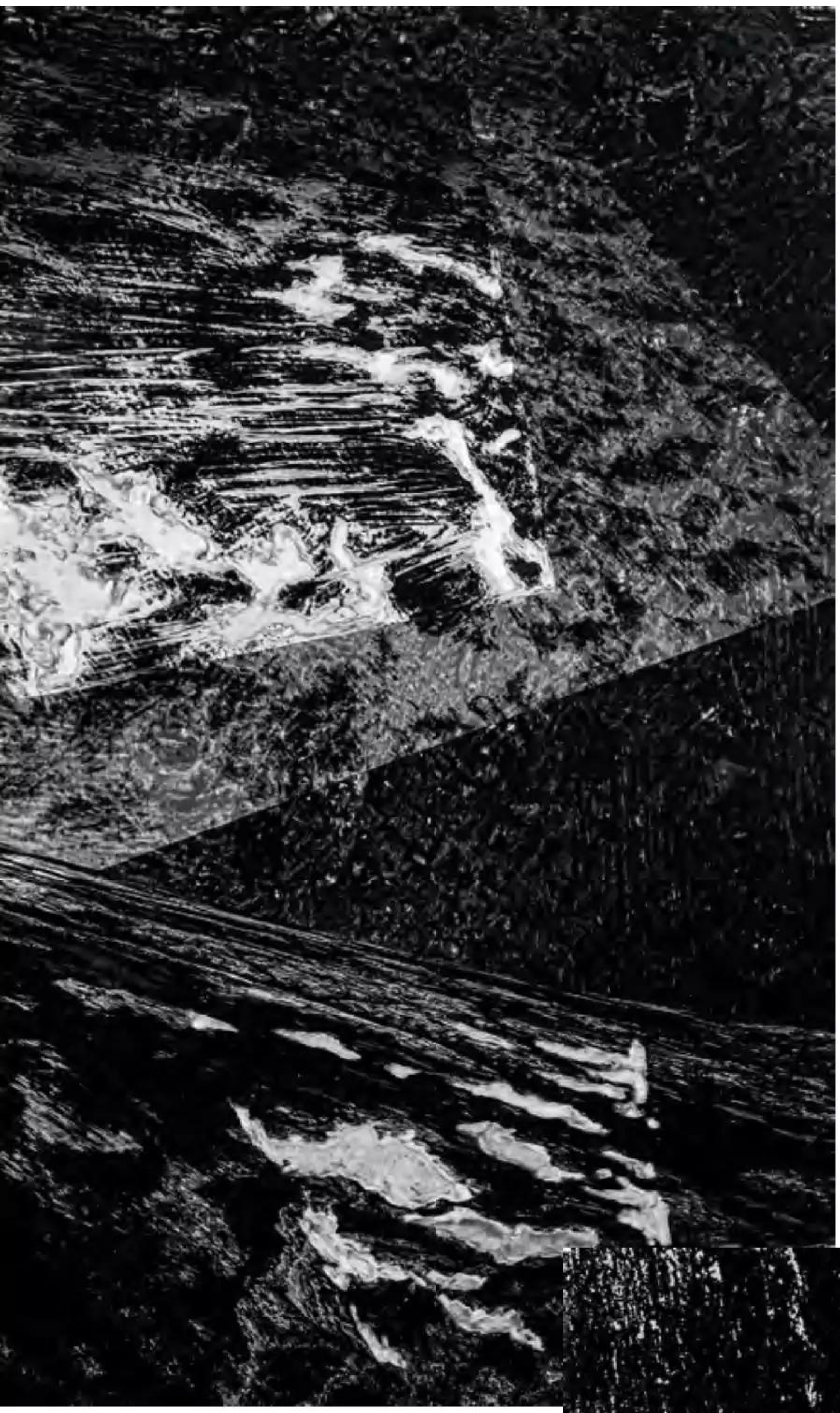
First, I 'develop' my shots (my raw materials) in RAW format (raw data) using Lightroom.
Next comes the actual creative work with Photoshop:
Here, I have taken as an example the image entitled The End of Time, which is a simple creative process.

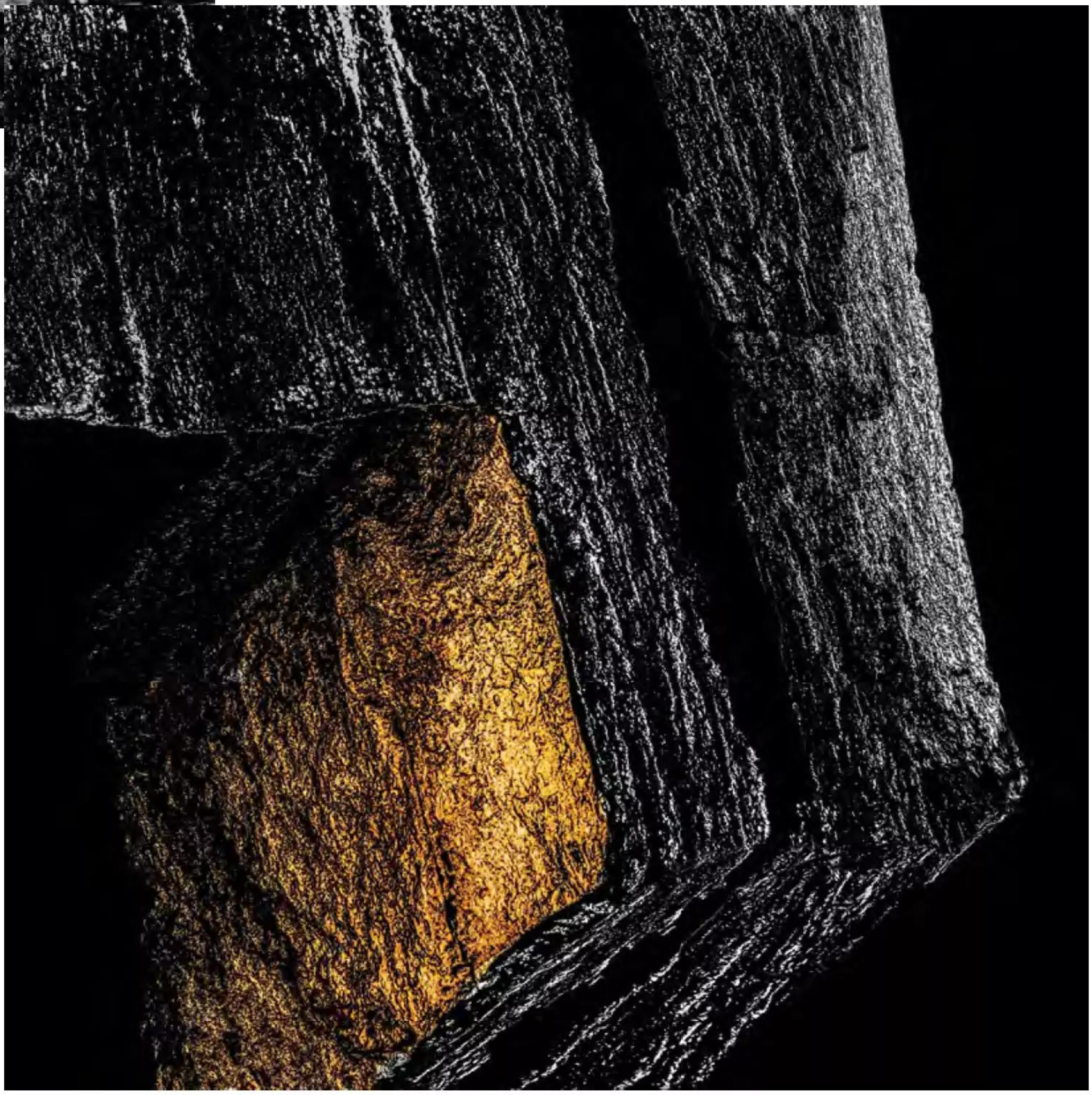
1. I display a first image on a first layer, in which I select a section with irregular contours. I then modify the colours and shape.
2. On a second layer, I create the predella band by copying and pasting small parts of the first image.
3. On a third layer, I import another image to create a background. I also modify its colours and dimensions, then cut out this background irregularly. This outline will define torn-looking margins that reveal the backing, in this case brushed gold aluminium.

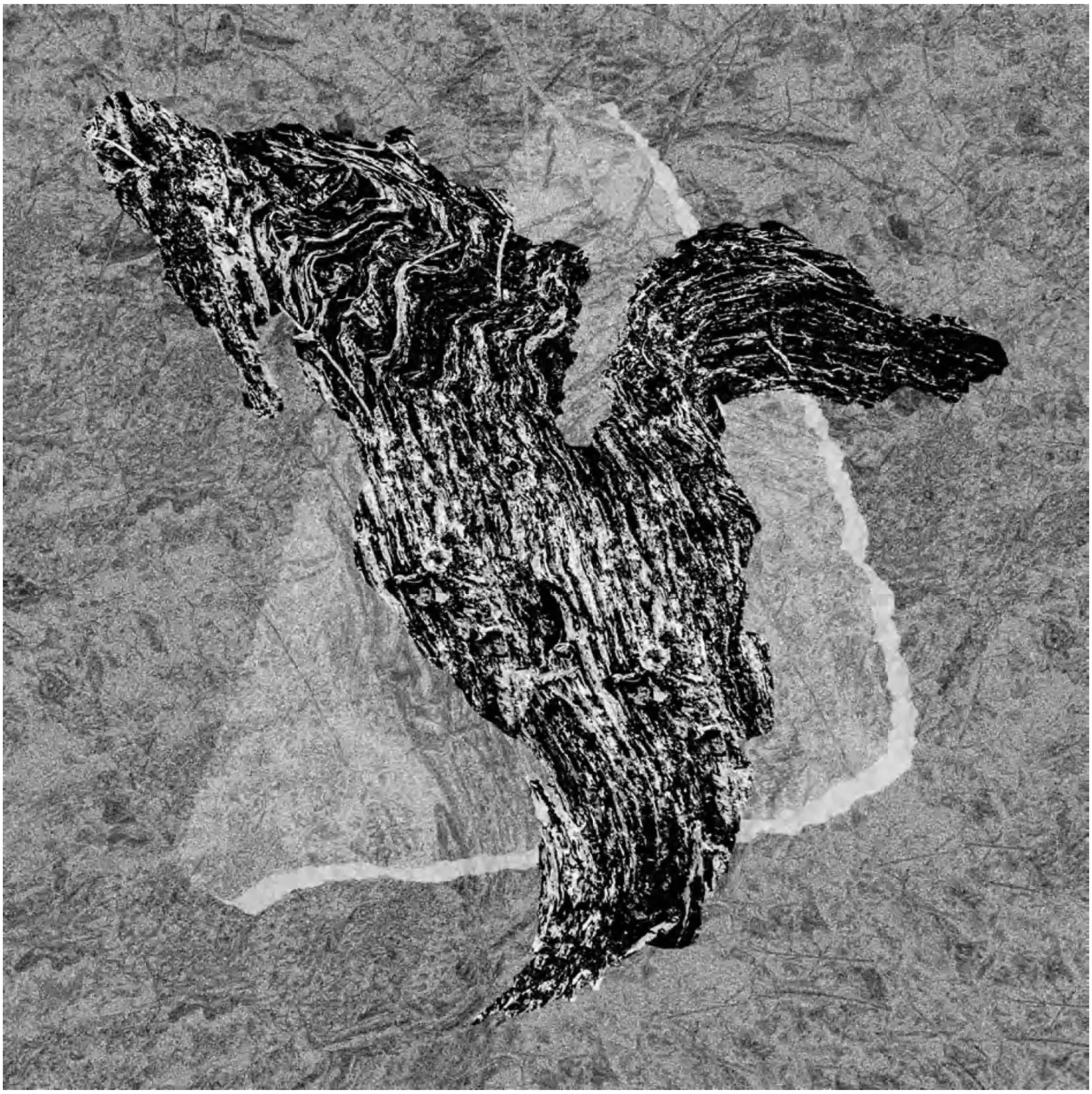
← **59** De Materia 04, photographism, print on Dibond, 50 x 50 cm, 2022

← **60** De Materia 25, photographism, print on Dibond, sanding, 50 x 50 cm, 2024

61 De Materia 29, photographism, print on brushed aluminium, 60 x 60 cm, 2025 ↓





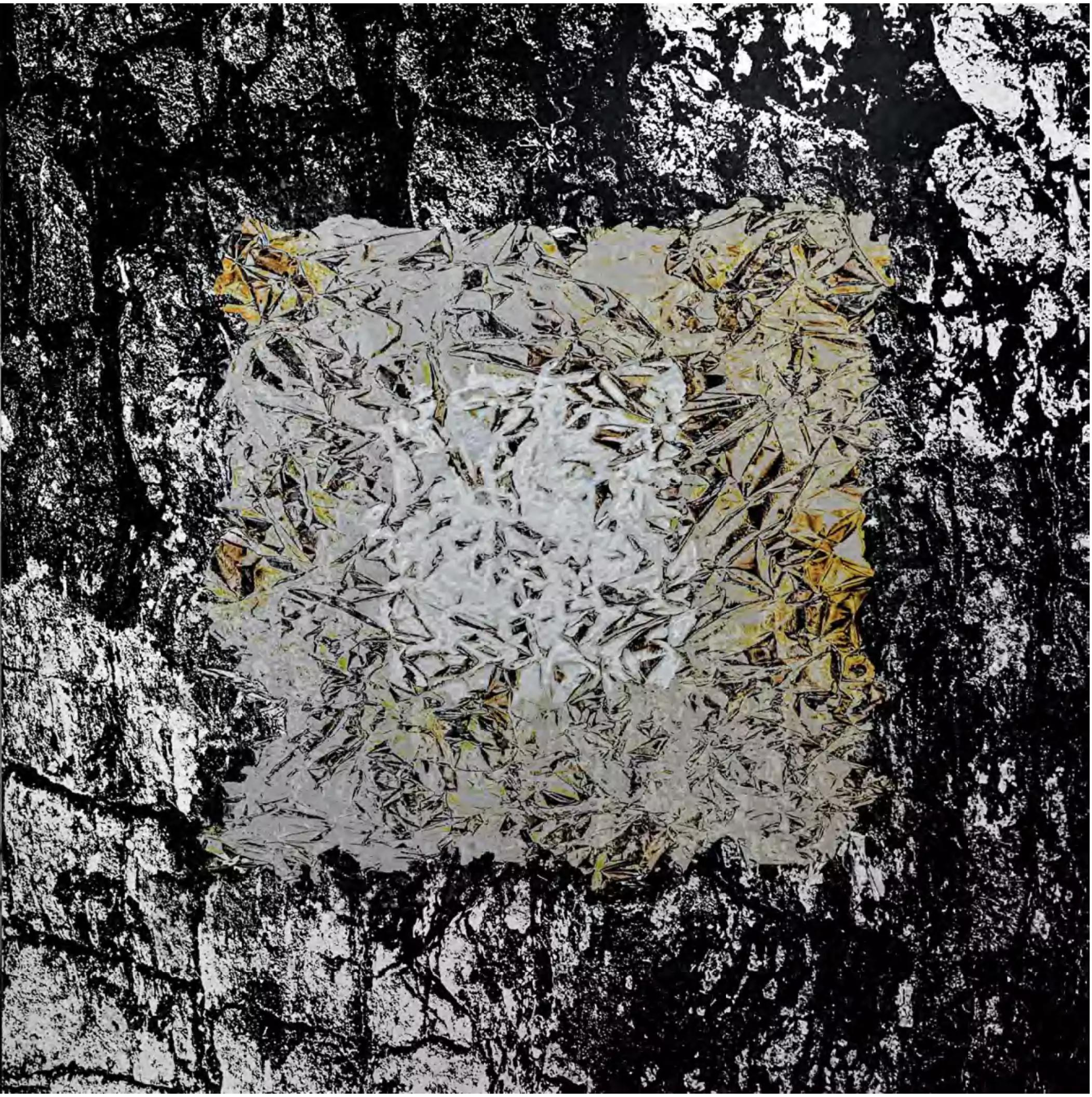


The tour of the workshop comes to an end. Jean-Luc Labrette adds that it was Alechinsky who inspired him to revisit this composition, common in the Middle Ages, featuring an altarpiece and predella. The aim was, on the one hand, to reconnect with tradition and, on the other, to open up the work to narration. Another project would be to compose a true triptych, surmounting a predella. Yet another would be to print in relief.

I leave with a clearer idea of Jean-Luc Labrette's photography and the element of chance, improvisation and playfulness that goes into his work. I tell myself that the future looks like an astonishing series of apocalyptic events, but that it is good to be able to contemplate powerful, authentic works that strive for beauty and thereby offer a form of hope.

← **62** De Materia 40, photographic print, printed on Dibond, 50 x 50 cm, 2022

63 De Materia 69, photographic print, printed on brushed aluminium, sanded, 80 x 80 cm, 2024 ↓



Clara Tournay

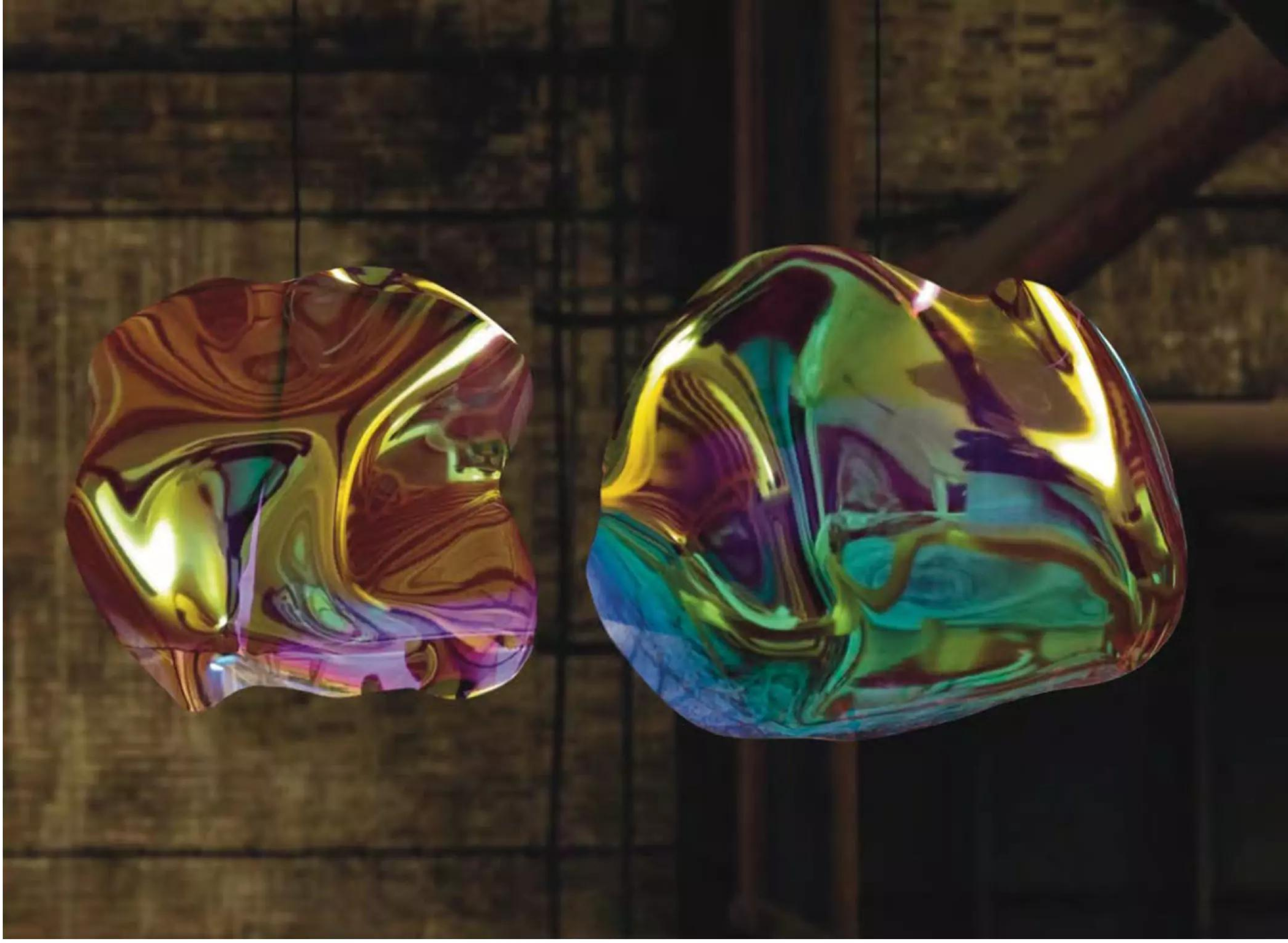
Emmanuelle Callerame

Born in 1996, visual artist Clara Tournay is one of the rising stars of the contemporary art scene. Her artistic practice combines painting, sculpture and installation in a constant dialogue between materials. Like a magician, she tames Light – both the source and quest of her work – plays with its reflections and explores its metamorphoses.

Deeply inspired by magical realism and mythology, she celebrates the beauty and mysteries of nature, without ever revealing all its secrets. Her works are like open books on invisible worlds, secret passages to distant galaxies, inviting us to scrutinise the surface and dive into a new reality.

64 Portrait of the artist in his studio, 2023 ->

left: Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, 2023
right: The lake sparkled, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 250 cm, 2023



Hello Clara! Your art is deeply abstract, even though it conceals fragments of text, silent landscapes and subtle clues between its successive layers. What are you trying to provoke in the viewer through these sensitive and poetic treasure hunts?

Hello! First and foremost, I seek to explore the intersections between memory, temporality and perception. This involves painting, sculpture, installation and sometimes even performance. I refuse to limit myself to a single medium. I like to first provoke a sense of wonder, then invite deeper questioning about social and environmental issues.

For me, a work of art must occupy a middle ground: neither completely legible nor completely opaque. The viewer guesses, projects themselves into it. I work on what escapes the gaze, on the transition from the formless to the tangible, in order to make invisible worlds accessible.

↑ **65** Maeve Suspension,
polycarbonate and dichroic film,
80 x 60 x 0.3 cm, 2024

Your series of sculptures entitled "Maeve" takes its name from a Celtic goddess. How did this myth come to you and how is it embodied in your works?

It all began with a reflection on the representation of femininity in history and its symbolism. At my mother's house, I had a deck of cards dedicated to "earth mother" goddesses: Pachamama, Gaia... and Maeve, who stood out. This Celtic figure embodies fertility, cycles and feminine power.

I became interested in primitive statuettes worshipped by different civilisations, then linked this research to my work on light and matter.

In the "Maeve" series, the granite and marble come from quarry waste, fragments that already carry memories. I then combine them with polycarbonate, which I bend, blow and shape by hand. Translucent and undulating, it envelops the stone like a breath of air. Light then becomes the ultimate sculptor, transforming the work with every glance.

These pieces, thermoformed and then moulded in contact with my body, take on organic shapes. They evoke female bodies as well as water droplets, mermaids, bubbles, or clouds. Three years of research went into the "Maeve" series, which constantly questions the link between the veneration of Mother Earth and natural forces.

In these sculptures, you use polycarbonate, which you blow, mould and shape like glass, in a spiritual, hands-on process. What does this material reveal about your relationship with time and memory?

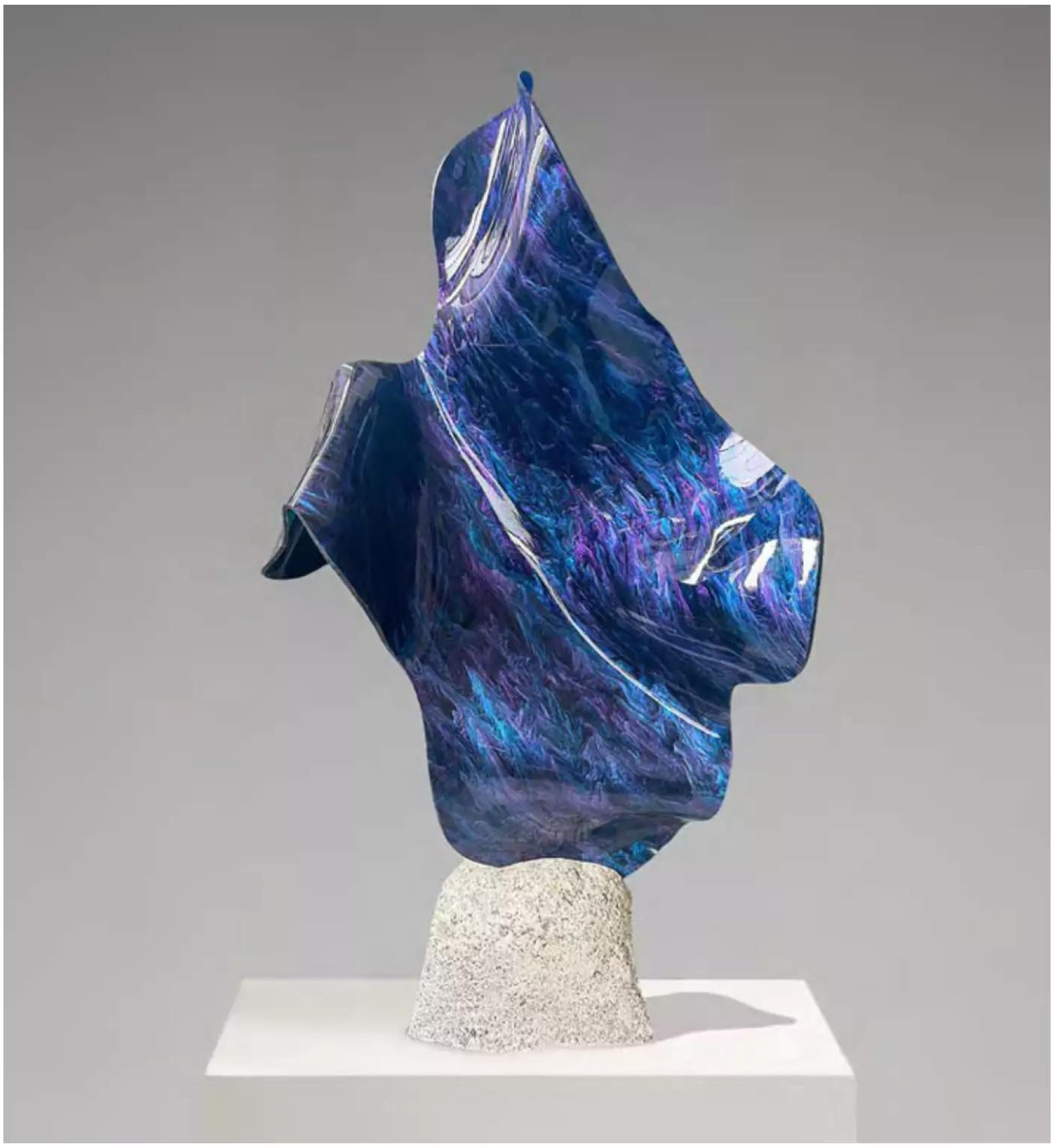
I chose polycarbonate because it retains traces of movement. It deforms and solidifies, while still allowing light to pass through it. I transform this material, steeped in industrial history, into something almost organic. By combining it with stone, I explore this duality: organic or artificial? Nature or human?

Your latest installation, La mer qu'on voit danser (The Sea We See Dancing), presented during Nuit Blanche 2025 at the Cognacq-Jay Museum, evokes the imagery of The Odyssey, combining sculpture, dance and the song of the sirens. How did you conceive this immersive experience?

The project began with a call for applications in December. Once my proposal was accepted by the City of Paris and the venue, the Cognacq-Jay Museum, I had four months to create everything. The scenography, the number and type of sculptures, the lighting effects, the sound composition, the choreography... all without losing sight of the central theme: history.

Thus, the museum courtyard, with its arches and Parisian cobblestones, became a passageway between two worlds. I suspended two large breast-shaped pieces, one iridescent turquoise, the other iridescent black. The dancer Hélène Guilguet entered through the first arch, which symbolised the entrance to a marine and imaginary world, before exiting through the second, dark arch, symbolising our world in peril. Around her, fifteen sculptures from my "Maeve" series mingled with her dance, becoming one with her performance.

In this installation, everything was in the details: the shifting shadows, the changing reflections of the works, the dancer's appearances and disappearances. The sea we see dancing was an invitation to cross a threshold, between the visible and the invisible, between matter and breath.



← **66** Blue Maeve – Medium format 2, polycarbonate on Vosges stone base, 60 x 60 x 30 cm, 2025

You often cite magical realism and the writer Haruki Murakami among your influences. What role do mythologies, cosmogonic narratives and parallel worlds play in your work?

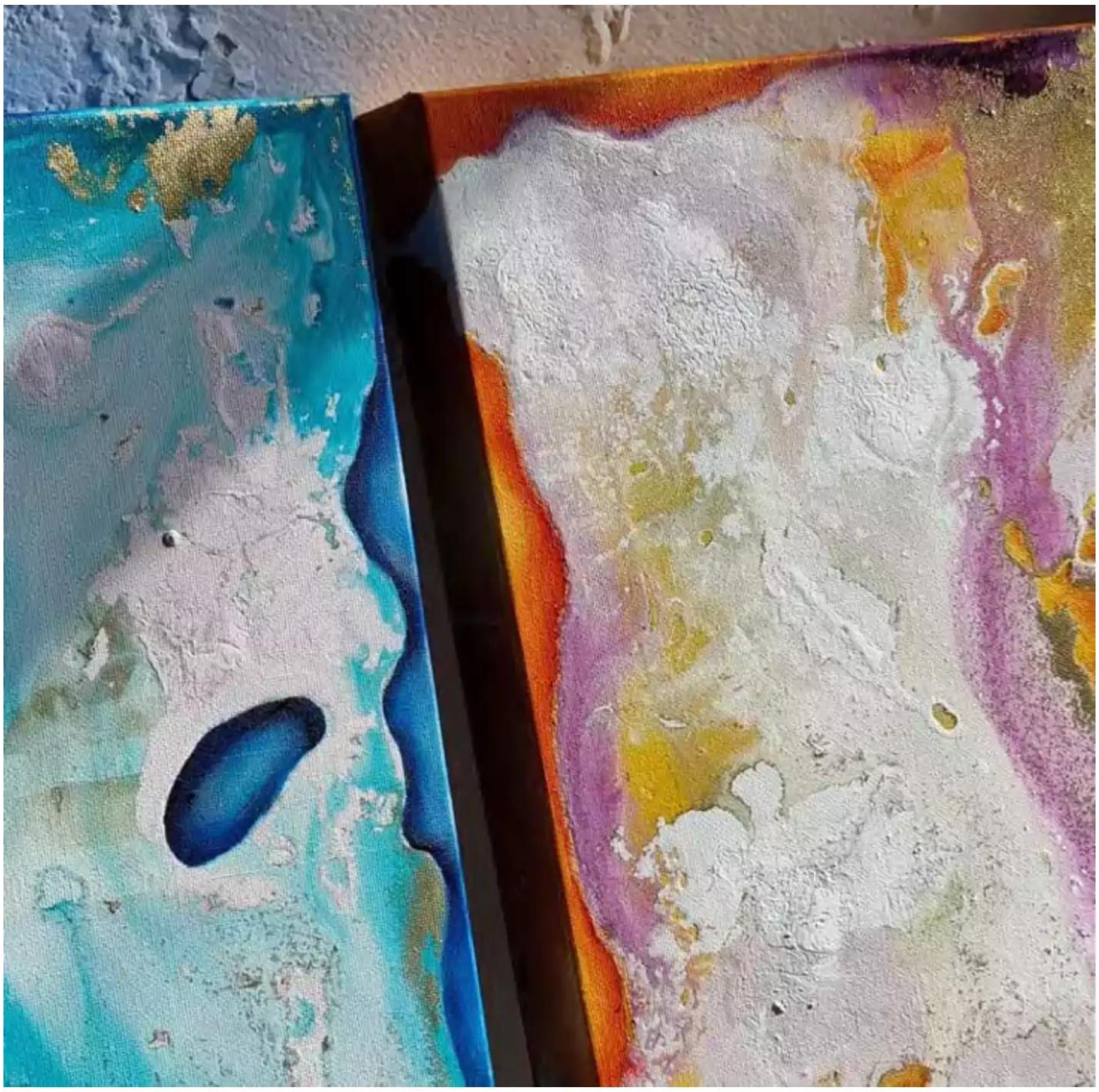
They are at the heart of it. Before creating, I always feed off reading and research, often focusing on stories that transcend our immediate reality. These myths and parallel worlds allow me to open up new perspectives, shift my gaze and invite the viewer to join me in these between-worlds.

Did your residence in 2024 on the island of Naxos, a veritable crossroads of myths and ancient civilisations, mark a turning point in your artistic approach? What forms, intuitions or stories did you bring back from this experience in the heart of the Cyclades?

Yes, completely. For a year, I had lost my touch with painting. Comments on unfinished works had cut me off from what I call the flow, that momentum where you paint without stopping, in a continuous flow.

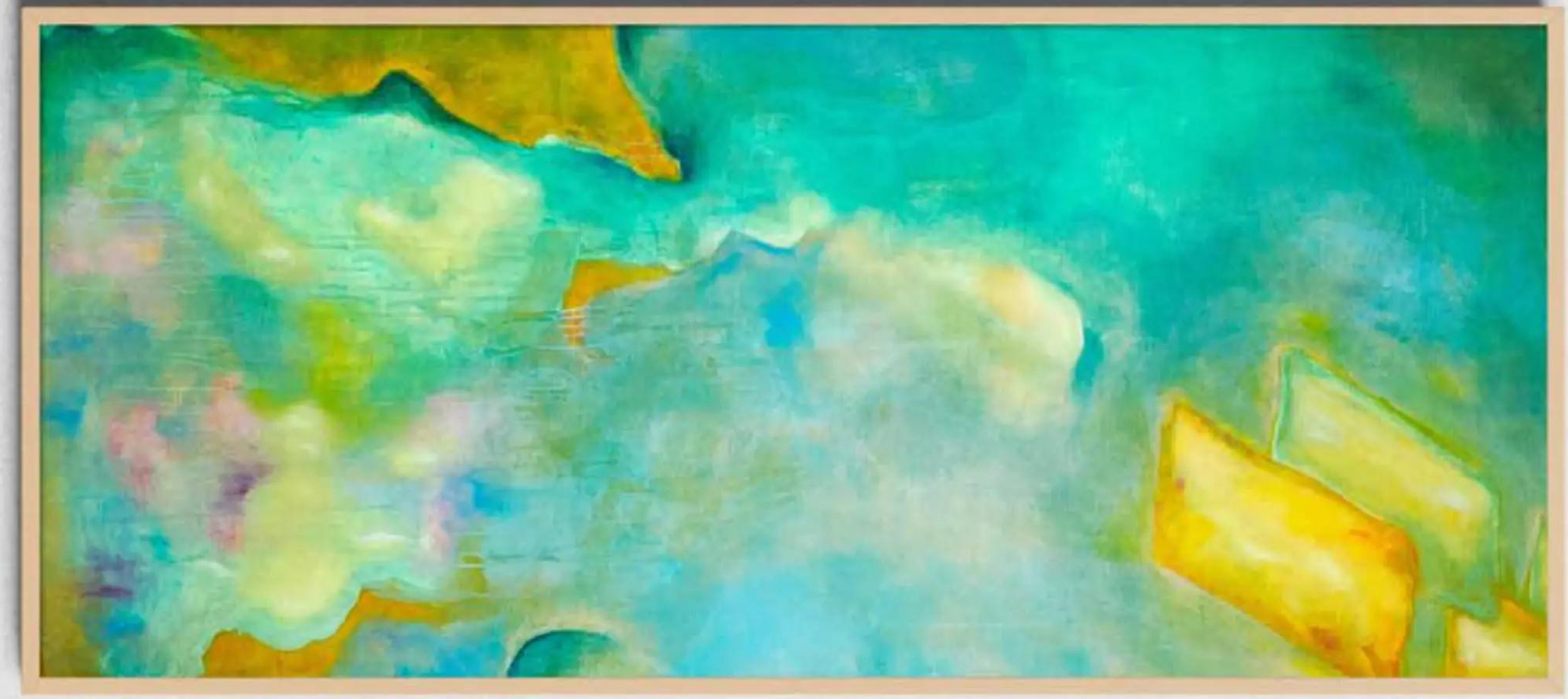
In Naxos, Greece, in the light-filled Saint Anthony Chapel, I was able to refocus, experiment, and rediscover that pleasure. Three weeks of intense work, fuelled by the power of the place and its inhabitants, allowed me to reconcile my painting with my sculpture. Before leaving, I completed my major work, Le Visage d'Églantine (The Face of Églantine), in exactly two nights and three days. This work marks a break with my previous style and a move towards my new pictorial work.

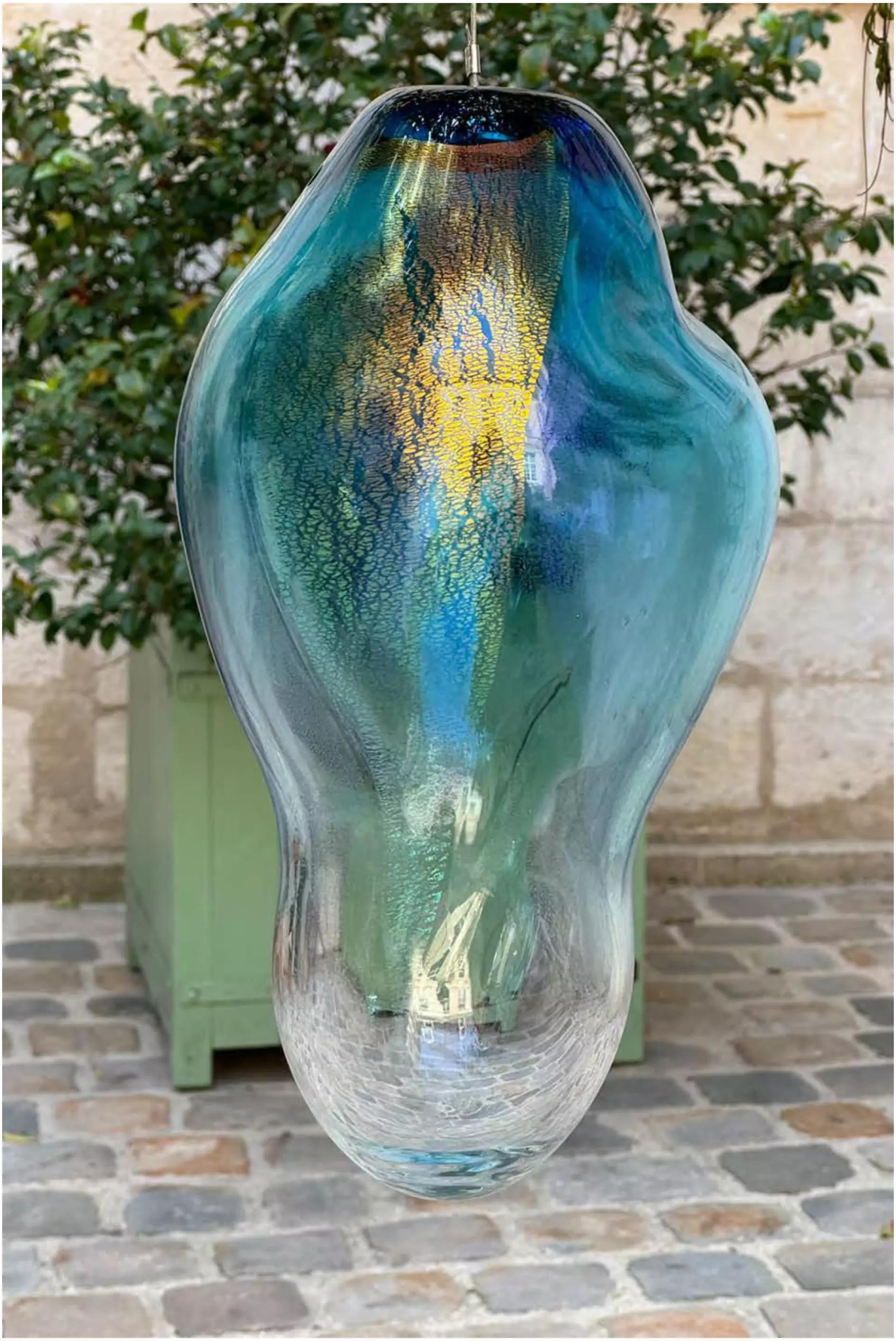
In fact, all the names of my works come from books and excerpts that I choose instinctively once the canvas is finished. At that point, I open one of the books in front of me at random, point my finger at a page, and almost every time, the title perfectly echoes the work. For example, in Le Visage d'Églantine (The Face of Églantine), a face can be clearly seen on the canvas.



← **67** Door to Another Place I and II, details, acrylic and oil paint on cotton canvas, 30 x 40 cm, 2024

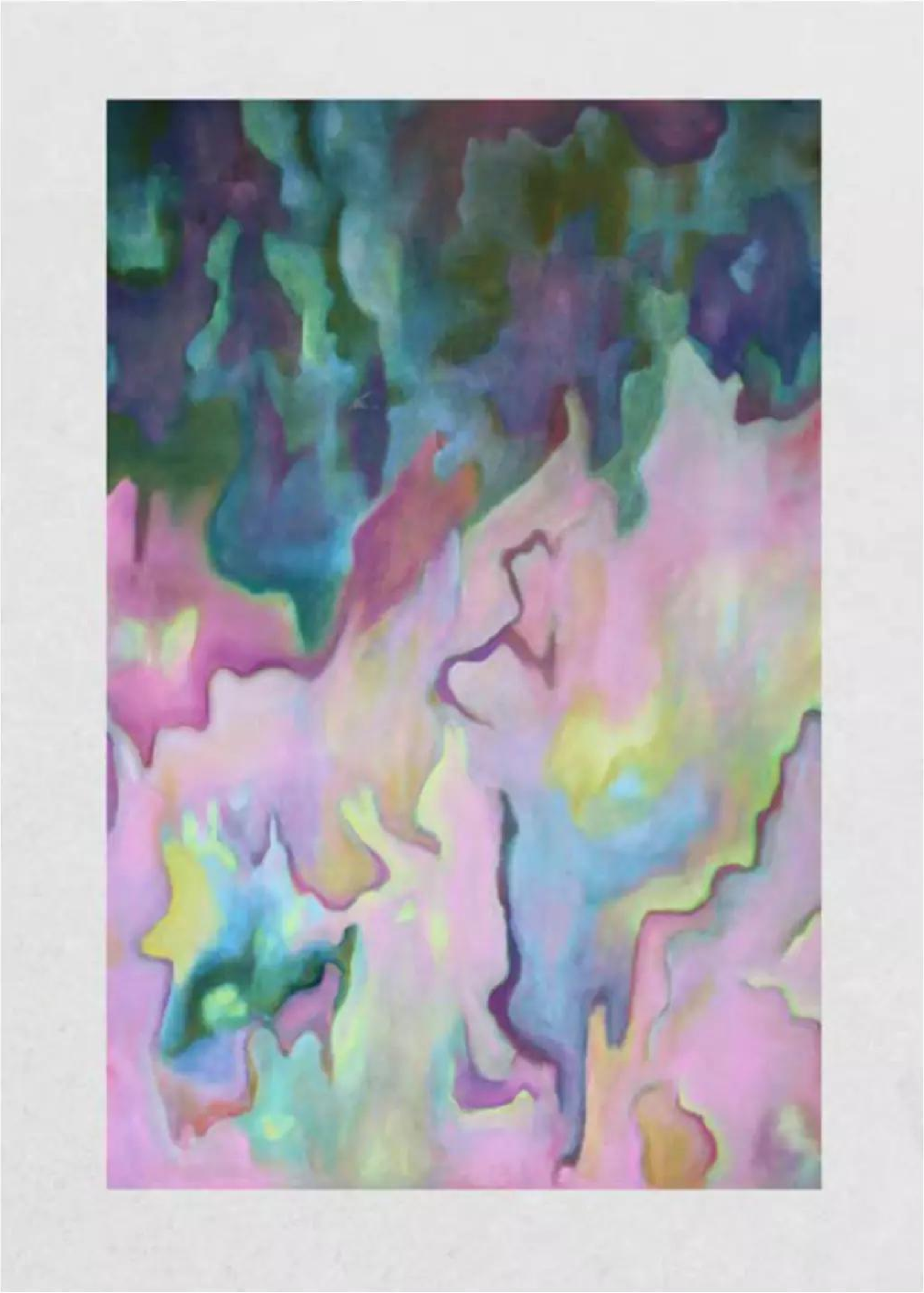
68 The Face of Églantine, oil paint on canvas, 192 x 87 cm, 2025 -&gt;





← **69** Terra Mater, glass and pigments, 40 x 20 x 20 cm, 2025

70 Underwater Life, oil painting on canvas, 195 x 130 cm, 2025 -&gt;



Between the shifting reflections of your sculptures and the iridescent pigments you favour in your paintings, the quest for light is central to your work. Why is that? Can you tell us about your creative process?

Light is a source of wonder. It makes the ephemeral tangible and reveals the passage of time. It has always been at the heart of my work.

My painting is part of an organic process. In my paintings, I progress step by step, letting colours and my movements influence meaning and form. The layers of paint are like skin, inviting us to scrutinise the surface to see what lies beneath. My works often resemble observations under a microscope or the cosmic world, between planets, asteroids and nebulae. Ultimately, my work is punctuated by shifts between the micro and the macro, revealing new worlds.

You divide your time between the cultural effervescence of Paris and the earthy silence of the Vosges mountains. Does this geographical duality also shape your relationship with creativity?

Yes, the two complement each other. Paris gives me energy and encounters, while the Vosges offer me the space and silence I need for reflection.

What are your current and future projects, and what topics would you like to explore in the future?

In early October 2025, I will be presenting my work in a group exhibition at the Romero Paprocki Gallery, curated by the Galerie Dauphine.

From 6 to 26 October, I will also be participating in the group exhibition "Entre deux mondes" (Between Two Worlds), organised in Paris by you, Emmanuelle [Editor's note: Emmanuelle Callerame is an independent curator and founder of The New Curator]. Finally, in December, I will receive the Puvis-de-Chavannes Prize during an exhibition at the Fondation nationale des beaux-arts at the Réfectoire des Cordeliers in Paris.

Patrick McGrath Muñíz

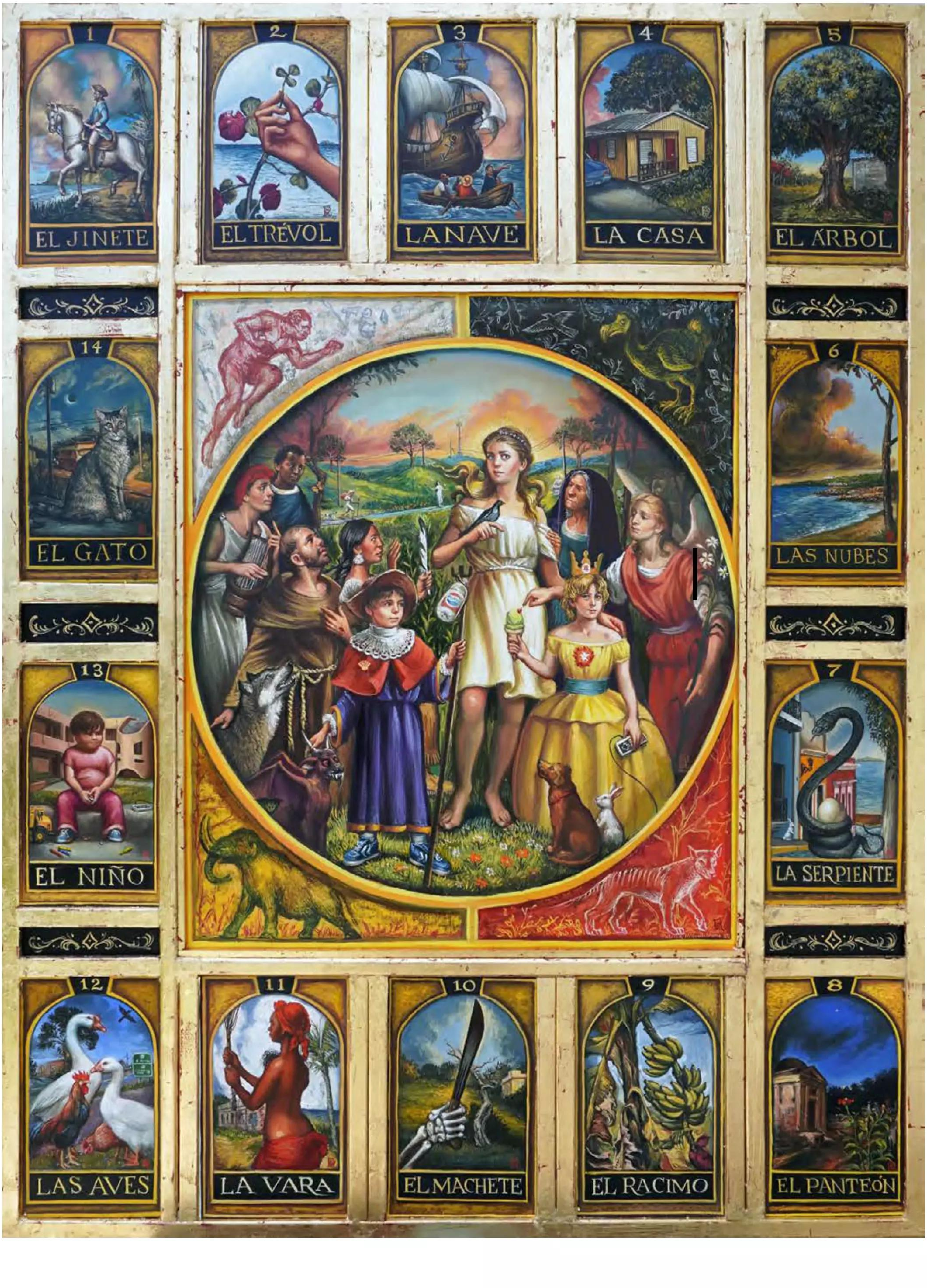
Ramses Luquis Ortega

Patrick McGrath Muñíz was born in New York and grew up in Aguadilla. He has spent half his life in Puerto Rico and the other half in the continental United States. Although he grew up in Puerto Rico, he currently lives in Texas with his wife Blanca and son Francis. Muñíz earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Puerto Rico in 2003 from the School of Fine Arts from San Juan and his master's degree from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Georgia, in 2006.

Muñíz has held numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, as well as in Guatemala, the Netherlands, New York, Mexico, Japan, Austria, and Spain, where his works have been added to several private collections abroad as well as museum collections in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and New Orleans.

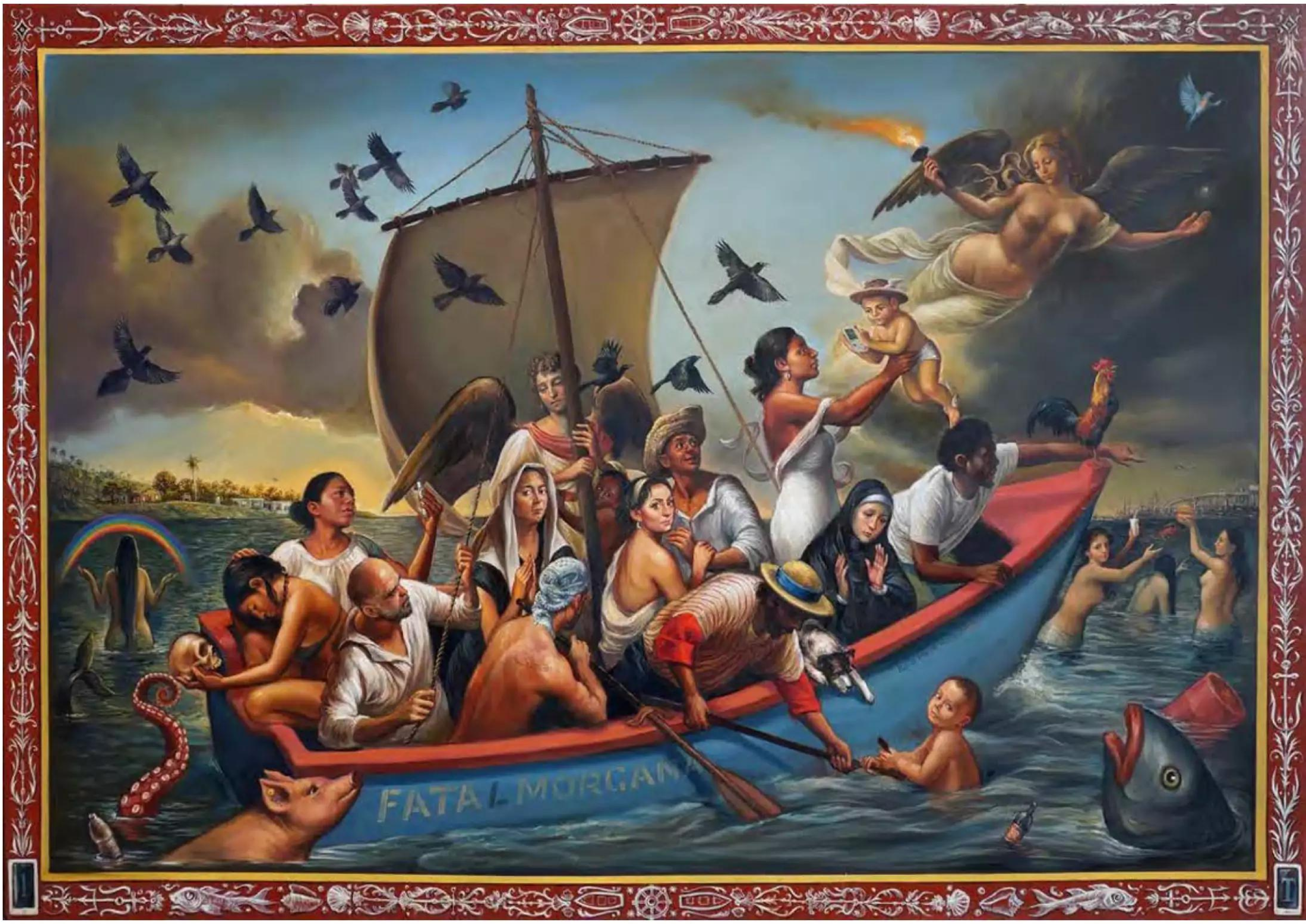
In 2021, he completed the Tarot neocolonial de las Américas. The idea germinated before Hurricane Maria swept through Puerto Rico and destroyed his home and studio. In this artistic 78-card deck, he summarises his experiences as well as the stories of the American conquest, from colonisation and consumer culture. Each card is drawn with a different motif and symbolism. After completing the set, he began a new series of paintings inspired by these drawings. They can thus be considered preliminary sketches for the paintings that followed.

71 The Bloom (Primavera), oil and metallic foil on polyptych panel, 86.4 x 121.9 cm, 2025 →


1
EL JINETE
2
EL TRÉVOL
3
LA NAVE
4
LA CASA
5
EL ÁRBOL
14
EL GATO
6
LAS NUBES
13
EL NIÑO
7
LA SERPIENTE
12
LAS AVES
11
LA VARA
10
EL MACHETE
9
EL RACIMO
8
EL PANTEÓN

Many of your paintings explore the concept of myth and mythology, which is the subject of this new issue of Argument magazine. Which ancient and modern mythologies interest you?

The myths and mythologies of the world are a great source of inspiration. I find it a unique opportunity not only to address current issues such as climate change, consumerism and all those questions that could transcend time, that go back a long way, but I also see them as an opportunity to connect with my own history and give meaning to life from a mythological perspective. I try to reflect on my own existence, my travel experiences, the different places I have lived, and I try to connect with the mythical world. After all, we are all trying to find meaning; these are stories we tell each other. And that is the whole point of my work. Ultimately, it becomes more personal and introspective.



↑ **72** Entre Tierras, oil on canvas, 165.1 x 114.3 cm, 2024

One of the most important themes in your work is consumerism. Do you consider it to be another mythology? Just like people's interest in health, medicine, AI, all these things that people are intensely and frantically searching for. Do you consider this to be part of a mythology too, or something completely different?

We can see this through the prism of myth. There are many interpretations. I can think of a perfect example, the myth of Pandora's box. It was given as a gift to humanity; humanity was also given a box from which all the curses of humanity escaped. I feel that AI, technology, consumerism, all of these could be considered different elements that come out of this box. So we can see things this way, and this is just one example of how I view mythology, as an opportunity to talk about the problems of our time.

When we discuss your art, we do not engage in an informal conversation over afternoon tea. We are immersed in very congested canvases, populated by numerous characters and images, which draw our gaze to the centre of a Colosseum arena where, like Nero, we witness the spectacle and contradictions of the characters, and we must make decisions about everything. what is happening. Thus, in your paintings, we do not see a single subject. They are not intended for lazy viewers. If you are asleep, you will not grasp them. Is it intentional to make your art performative?

Yes, it can seem very overwhelming and oversaturated, but that's because we're saturated right now with so much information. As you said, the word "congestion" is perfect, and I think it describes our times. There are so many people, so many things, so much news. So much is happening. We absorb it all, and at the same time, it's part of who we are. Experiencing everything collectively as humanity today. For example, think of all the options, all the apps on your phone, all the things you can buy. We've never lived in a time where we've been offered so many options, and I feel the same way as the rest of the world.

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to visit your workshop in Puerto Rico called Taller Aymaco, and you had some works of art depicting tropical environments exploring Cubism and Impressionism. What triggered the change in subject matter in your current mythical narrative representations? Did this happen as part of a return to the past while you were pursuing your master's degree?

It was a gradual change. When I arrived in the United States, it changed everything I did. My professors would question me. Why this, why that, why are you adding this element? There is a reason for everything when you enter the academic world; everything needs to be justified. So, I started to rethink and re-evaluate everything. What are the things that are really important to me? My own identity, where I come from. What makes art meaningful and relevant? It wasn't just about moving, but also about how I learned to realise that I am half and half, half Irish-American, half Puerto Rican, and that I had to accept both sides of myself. So I had one foot in the present and one foot in the past. I've lived half my life on an island (Puerto Rico), but also half my life here, and that's becoming more and more relevant today. The year 2005 was a turning point because that's when I moved to the American mainland and started looking back at Puerto Rico, but at the same time moving forward with a different perspective. With a changed appreciation for what I had experienced. I thought about certain things I had left behind, but once I was gone, I saw them differently.

Does being in exile change an artist's narrative? Is it necessary to distance oneself from the immediacy of everyday life in order to discover new paths?

Migration is something that many of us have to experience. I believe that if I had stayed in Puerto Rico, and perhaps you can speak to this from your own experience as well, things would have been different. Living on an island is unique. There is a colonial mentality that permeates everything. We are very isolated in many ways.

But didn't you notice this colonial mindset when you were living on the island?

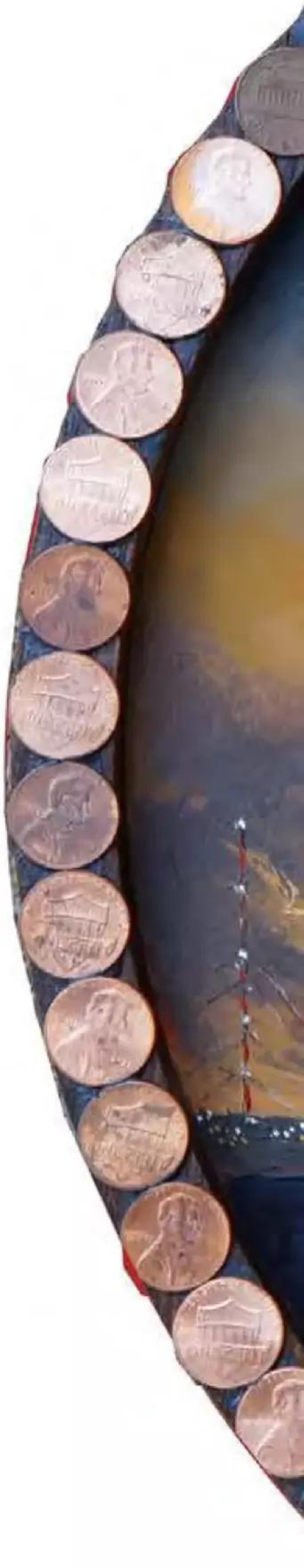
Yes, but it was different. It was different because you are bombarded by the same local news and you don't see the outside world. You think that everything revolves around this small island. We always talk about the same things, the same topics. Everything is small and revolves around a very limited circle. When you move away from this place, you start to appreciate what is overlooked, what is ignored on the island, such as nature. People don't talk about these things, they just take them for granted. They don't miss them because they see them every day at home. Once you've lived away from the island for a few years, your memories of this place change. Once you've left, once you're away from it, you no longer live in that autonomous bubble. On an island, you're like in a bubble, and it's hard to really see the world as a whole if you're inside it.

By focusing on the physical aspect of your work and your personal experience of the sacred, you integrate the frame into the artwork. You enlarge the painting with the frame itself. Why did you choose altarpieces (from the Latin retro tabula, 'behind the altar') ex-voto ('according to the vow')? Is this contextualised to your audience or your personal experience of the sacred? Do they add extra meaning and depth to the artistic experience? Is this technique more influenced by Central American or Spanish art?

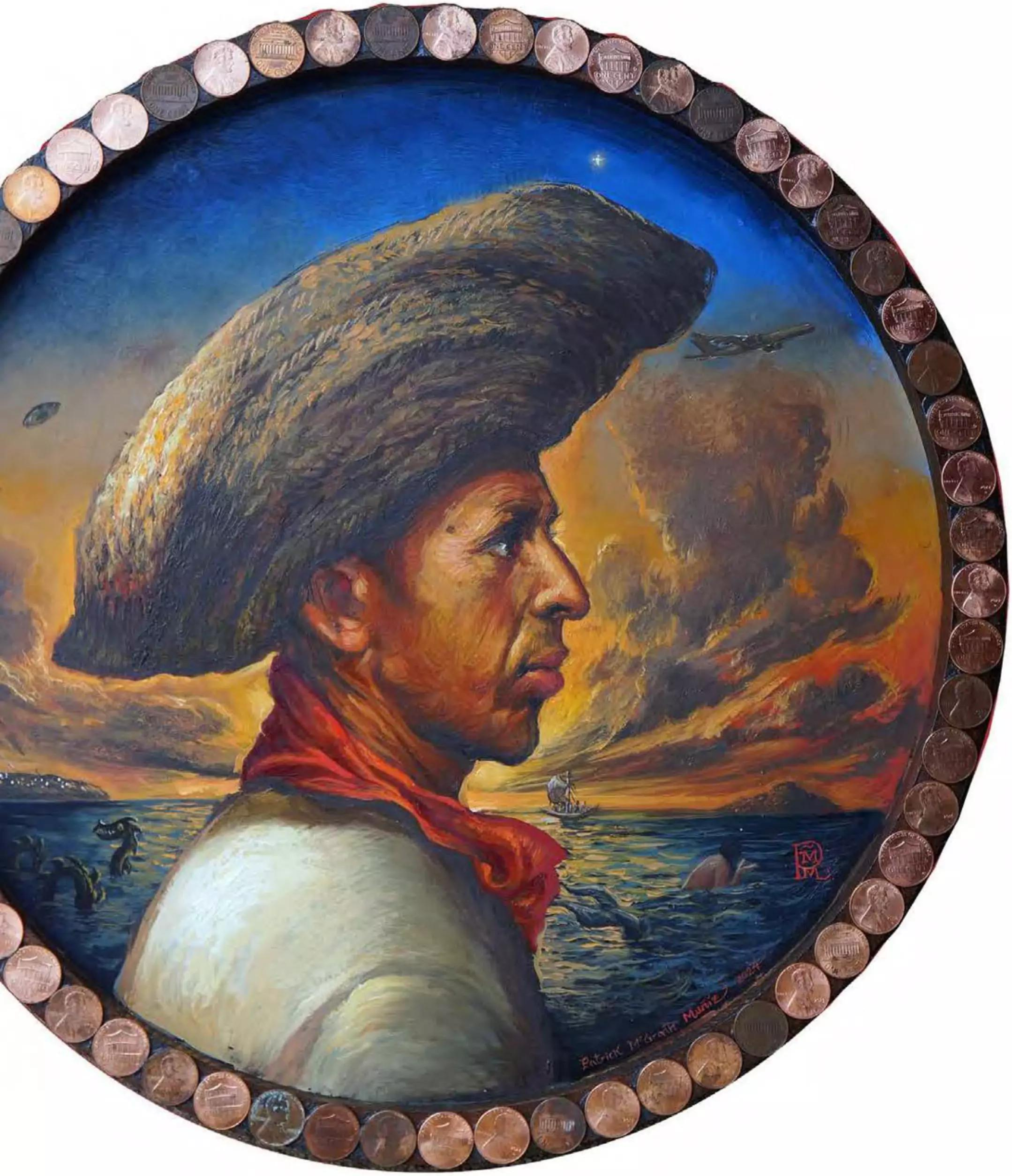
It's all of those things at once. Everything you mentioned, and it's personal too. I grew up happily surrounded by these objects. When I was little, some of my earliest memories are connected to my aunt's photographs hanging on the walls. She was a Catholic nun, and she had cards and images of saints and madonnas. In a way, I reconnect with these memories and rediscover them in different ways through Catholic art. So that was my first gateway into art, you could say. My first steps into art were through this type of imagery. Ex-votos and all these journeys, like the ones you mentioned in Central America and Mexico, are also very important. They are also a way for me to connect with the Spanish colonial sensibility, which I find very beautiful and makes me feel at home.

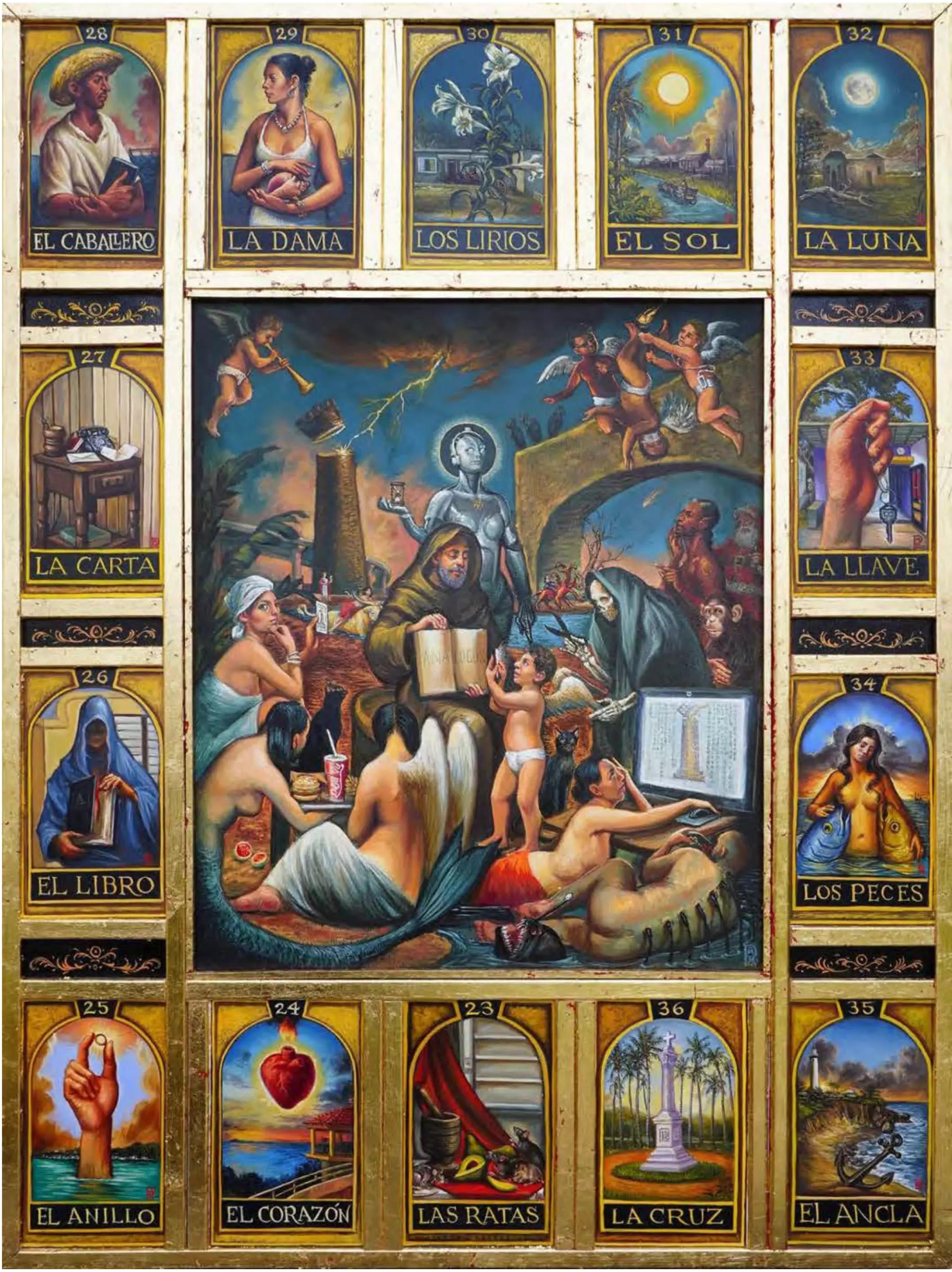
Even the frame. It doesn't matter what you add to it. The result is that we see something mysterious. It brings a sense of respect. A sense of reverence.

I feel that linking the mundane to sacred narratives gives the work a sacred aura through its format and presentation, but also something unexpected. You know, like putting references to fast food chains in these altarpieces. These are references to consumerism and all that, which is not something you would expect to find in an altarpiece. I also think it's part of the idea of linking the past and the present, but also, in a way, the sacred with the profane.



73 Añoranza, oil and coins on round panel, Ø 38.1 cm, 2024 →


Patrick McGrath Muñiz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EL CABALLERO
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LA DAMA
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LOS LIRIOS
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EL SOL
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LA CARTA
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EL LIBRO
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LOS PECES
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EL ANILLO
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EL CORAZÓN
23
LAS RATAS
36
LA CRUZ
35
EL ANCLA

I have noticed that you often appear in many of your paintings. You depict yourself as if teleported, but you always look like an innocent spectator, just like your wife and child. You portray yourself as a witness, or even a victim, of everything the work is trying to express. Why is it that whenever you are there, your expression is never marked by anger? It's not neither discontent nor joy, but a very interesting and mysterious characteristic. How do you feel as the audience of your own work? Do you feel overwhelmed by all the events surrounding you personally or as an impartial journalist, and do your paintings

Do they present themselves as news stories?

My goal is not to be a victim; let's put that aside. I am part of the problem. I am very aware of that. I am a consumer. I am not a preacher or someone who thinks they are superior to others. I feel closer to a hermit monk because I feel disconnected from everything, but at the same time, I try to address these issues through my own art. I try to assimilate all this information and interpret it, which is... the opposite of reporting. It's more about creatively filtering what I see and feel through my own prism. The more I think about it, the more it's really about telling stories through a very personal lens.

←**74** The Glitch (Winter), oil and metallic foil on polyptych panel, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, 2025

Suppose that the drawings and paintings you work with every day are vampires that exploit your skills and make you their victim. When you realise this, negotiations begin and you agree to be drained of your energy and pour your soul into the web. Little by little, the imminent risks of loss become apparent.

The loss of time, relationships, and other interests are buried, and your purpose asserts itself while bringing a smile to your face.

a smile on your face. Do you have any options to explore at the moment?

It's a bonfire of creativity. But it's much lighter than that. In fact, I feel like it's a relief, a therapy or a creative outlet that really releases everything and then frees up your energy. It's not about being able to contain all that pain, grief and regret. Release them, the things you've missed, that have been lost in life, and now they come back to life through the drawings.

It's like a river. You jump in, you don't fight the current, you let yourself be carried away.

I don't fight it most of the time, but when I do, maybe we should ask ourselves: why am I doing this, right?

How do you manage your freedom not to create? In a recent video on your YouTube channel, you share an old sketchbook from a dark period in your life.

where you left off with your drawings. Do you feel comfortable repeating this decision at any time, or are commitments and discipline more demanding bosses? You know these decisions will come up at any time, but with your current commitments...

"I have an exhibition in three months," "I need to produce more work"... Do you have the freedom to slow down when you want to, or is it more difficult to manage?

It's difficult to deal with, and it's good that you brought it up. We often forget these difficult moments in life. But I think that's what art is all about, and when you heal these wounds, it's a way of dealing with these problems, these scars and these things that hold us back, that we continue to carry around with us, all these demons inside us, and art is the means of exorcising them and bringing them out into the light.

What puts your art at risk? How might your finished work fail to communicate your intentions effectively? What would make you terribly disappointed in your production? What would make you say, "Oh no. I've completed the journey. I've finished my work, and I'm not satisfied with it." A distraction?

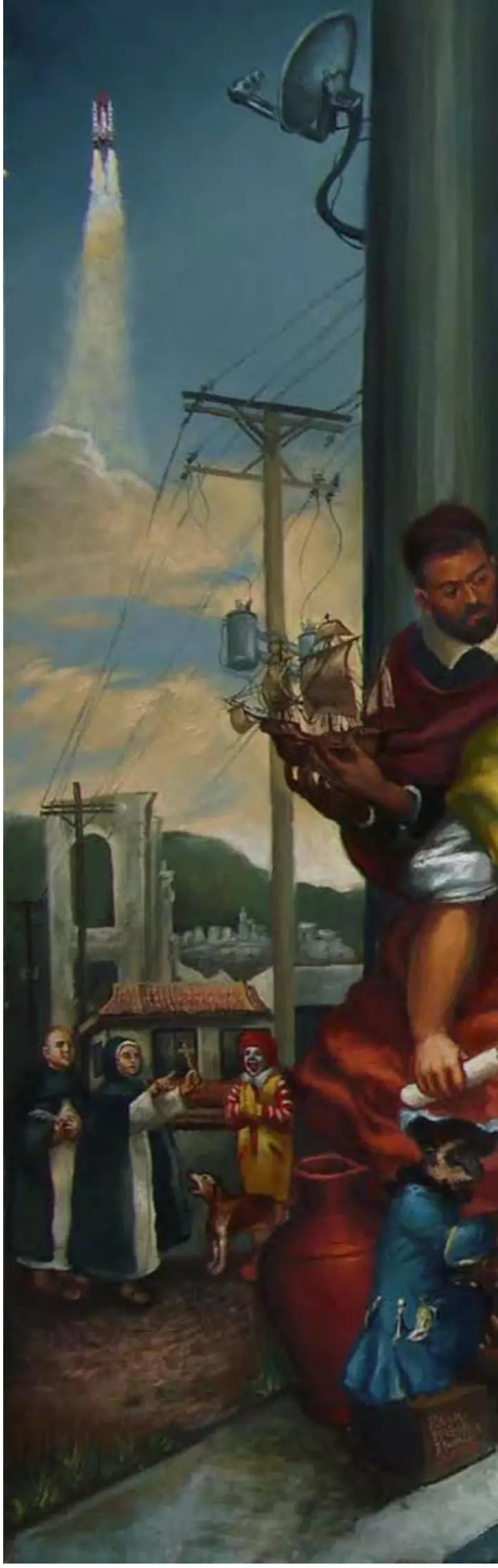
Yes, a distraction. I made several videos on the same subject. There are four paintings that really moved me, and that's actually the title of the video, but it was because of all the pressure to take everything in and deal with everything at once, which made me feel overwhelmed. Sometimes you have to manage each part differently, and I'm not talking about the parts of the painting at that moment, but problems in your own life, like a puzzle when you have to put everything together. It's easy to feel overwhelmed and weighed down when everything is getting you down. The danger would be to be distracted, not to focus, and not to have a clear direction and goal. When you do something, you have to be very clear about your intention. What am I trying to do with this particular work of art? I'm not talking about creating a beautiful portrait, you know. It's about knowing what message I really want to convey behind this portrait. And what I prescribe for myself to heal these wounds at the same time. So, the right direction is when the meaning goes in the direction of what I'm trying to communicate to the audience, but at the same time, what I'm trying to say to myself. And how am I trying to channel all that negativity or all the energy I need to free myself.

Have you ever caught yourself lying to yourself, asking yourself questions such as: "What am I saying?"

Yes, I always lie to myself. I think we all lie to ourselves.

There are times when we try to persuade in this context. You are working on a piece, and then it seems so easy to produce something that is not true, but which works for the painting nonetheless.

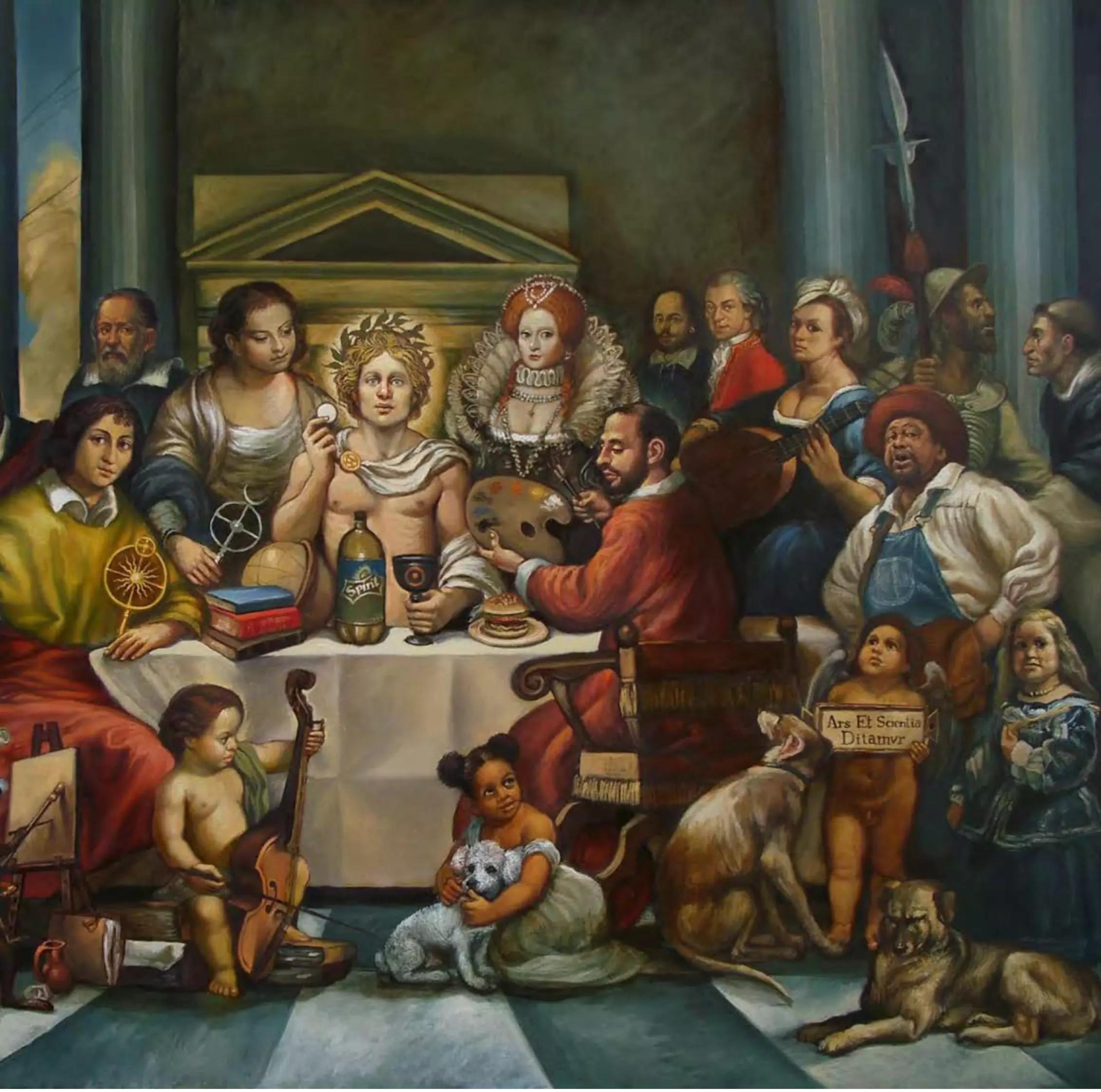
Ah yes, that's a tricky question. Sometimes it happens, and you have to let it be. Otherwise, all works would be the same. It's like every child is different. They have their own personalities, their own wishes, desires, characters, moods, and you just have to let that work of art be what it wants to be. It's about listening and connecting to that hidden energy. What does it want to be? And if that's what it wants to be, you just have to accept it, right? So yes, the problem is when we try to force things by trying to fit a square into a circle when it doesn't fit. We have to learn to accept things as they are. It's as simple as that!



75 Apollo Revisited, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 10.6 cm, 2013 →

You have over a hundred videos on your YouTube channel and you go to great lengths to make your viewers feel comfortable in your personal spaces. Where did your love of teaching come from?

Above all, it's about fulfilling this need for teaching. I used to teach, but since I no longer do, the YouTube channel allows me to share what I want.



How do you deal with the loneliness of not getting immediate feedback, and how do you manage to stay confident after spending five hours making a video?

Because I don't expect anything in return. If you expect something in life, you're going to be terribly disappointed, and that doesn't just apply to making YouTube videos, but to the work of art itself. I don't create a work of art by saying to myself, "My God, this is it! This is the masterpiece I've always dreamed of!"... and then it never sells, as if no one else but me sees it, and sometimes I want to do something and it's... Wow! You never know what people are going to see, and that shouldn't stop us from pursuing our own goals.

What's beautiful is the mystery of the video creator who might think, "Oh, I have to do this for my audience!" But you don't know who your audience is, and sometimes they're already somewhere else.

Yes. It's very broad, and as you say, you don't always get feedback, and sometimes you may even receive negative comments, but that doesn't mean you're wrong. You just have to keep moving forward.

As a parent, Patrick, watching your son grow up, is it tempting to unconsciously push him to become a carbon copy of everything you didn't become or everything you couldn't become? How can you find a balance between education natural tendency to reproduce a better version of yourself and an education that encourages individual exploration?

That's a very good question. I think the last option, which is to let him be who he wants to be. You have to encourage your children to follow their own aspirations. The last thing I would expect is for my son to be like me or to become an artist. In fact, I wouldn't recommend anyone to become an artist these days. I would say you have to think about it carefully. He's still very young, so I just tell him: go out, have fun, play.

How old is he now?

He's seven. Just be a child, play with your toys. That's all for now, and that's fine.

What do you consider relevant or sublime in master painters such as El Greco (Domenico Theotokópoulus), Zurbarán, and Murillo? What do you recognise as subtle or admirable in them? What is so extraordinary about these people? Not the individuals, but their art. What attracts you? What captivates you?

Yes, that's an excellent point. Especially the silent contemplative mysticism behind it all. It's a dark veil that covers mysteries, just like the simplest subject. I think there is so much to learn. There is something we have lost in our world with so many distractions, so many things left unsaid, and we are overwhelmed and bombarded with so much information that simply looking at these images from a distance or in person seems to be an antidote for our times. I see the noisy world we live in right now, and when I look at them, I look at their art as a source of inspiration, but also as a refuge.

How are you different from these people?

I live in a time that bombards me with so many things, it's so noisy. It's so difficult to maintain inner peace. I would never expect to be like them because I live in a very different world with lots of distractions and too many bills to pay, too many responsibilities and things that keep me away from my studio. It's very similar to when we were children. We had time ahead of us. Now, time flies. It's the same with our history. Our history has accelerated.

It seems that your artistic production is linked to a cultural niche. What could someone who has not been affected by American colonialism and its consumer culture take away from your message? Is contextualisation relevant to fully grasp and understand your art and have the same meaningful experience when viewing your work?

That's a very good question, but I think it's one you should ask them. Everyone will have a different perspective depending on their background, their journey and their own cultural baggage. I don't expect to have the answer to that question because my work will reflect my own cultural background and life experience, and I could say the same thing. What will I think of someone who is an artist in Nepal, Bangladesh or Turkey? How will I react? Everyone may have a different point of view.

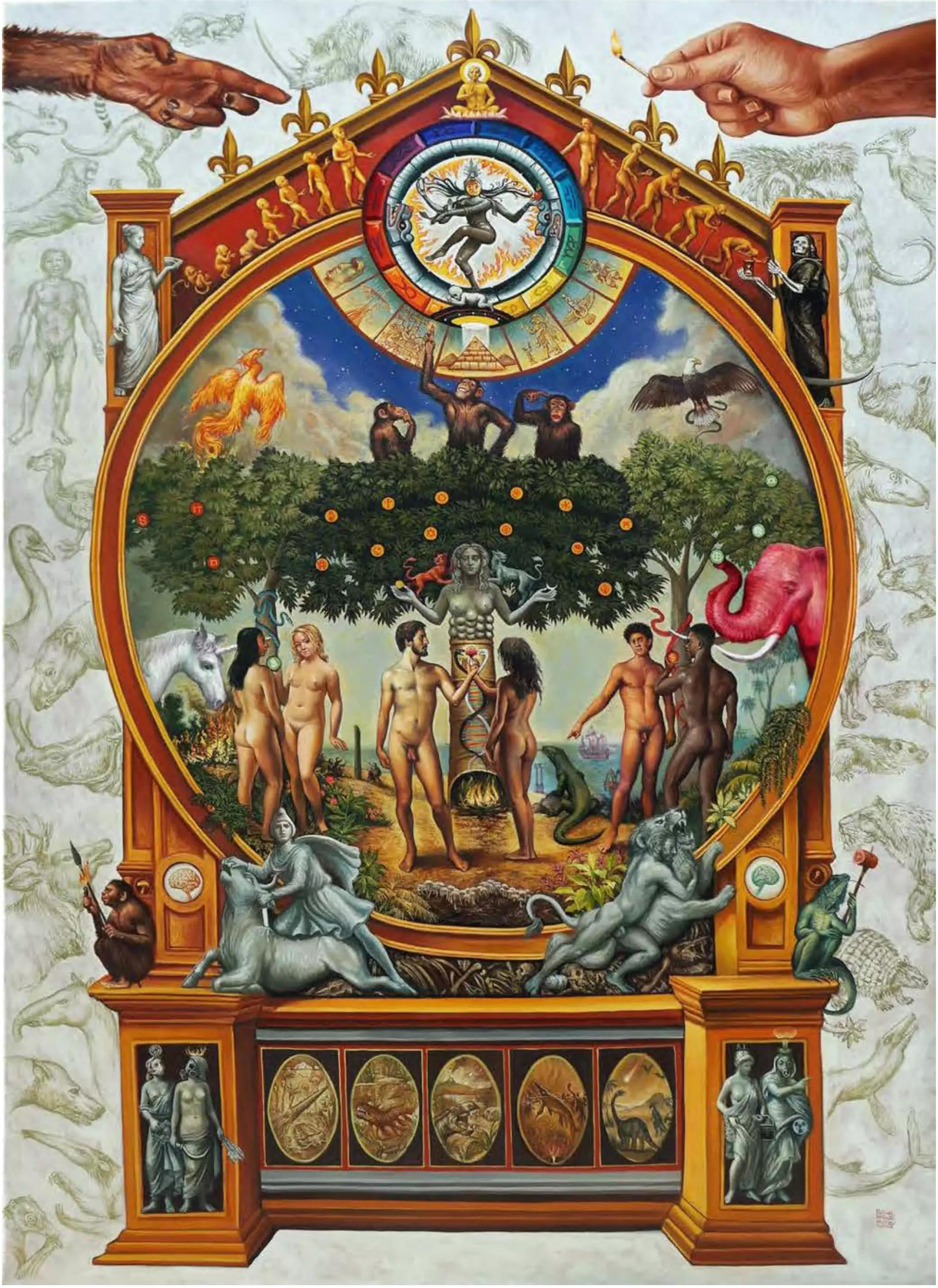
One of your paintings is called Apollon revisité (Apollo Revisited), and in its centre we see an allusion to the Last Supper, where almost all the characters are mocking.
Furthermore, in another painting, Creatio (2019), we observe a syncretism that fits perfectly within the norms.
wokes, with a juxtaposition of a phoenix and an eagle, as symbols and convergences between the mythical, the political and the familiar.
Sarcasm and cynicism are common.
Is this your prescription for dealing with the inevitability of changes we cannot face, perhaps as an escape or a crutch?

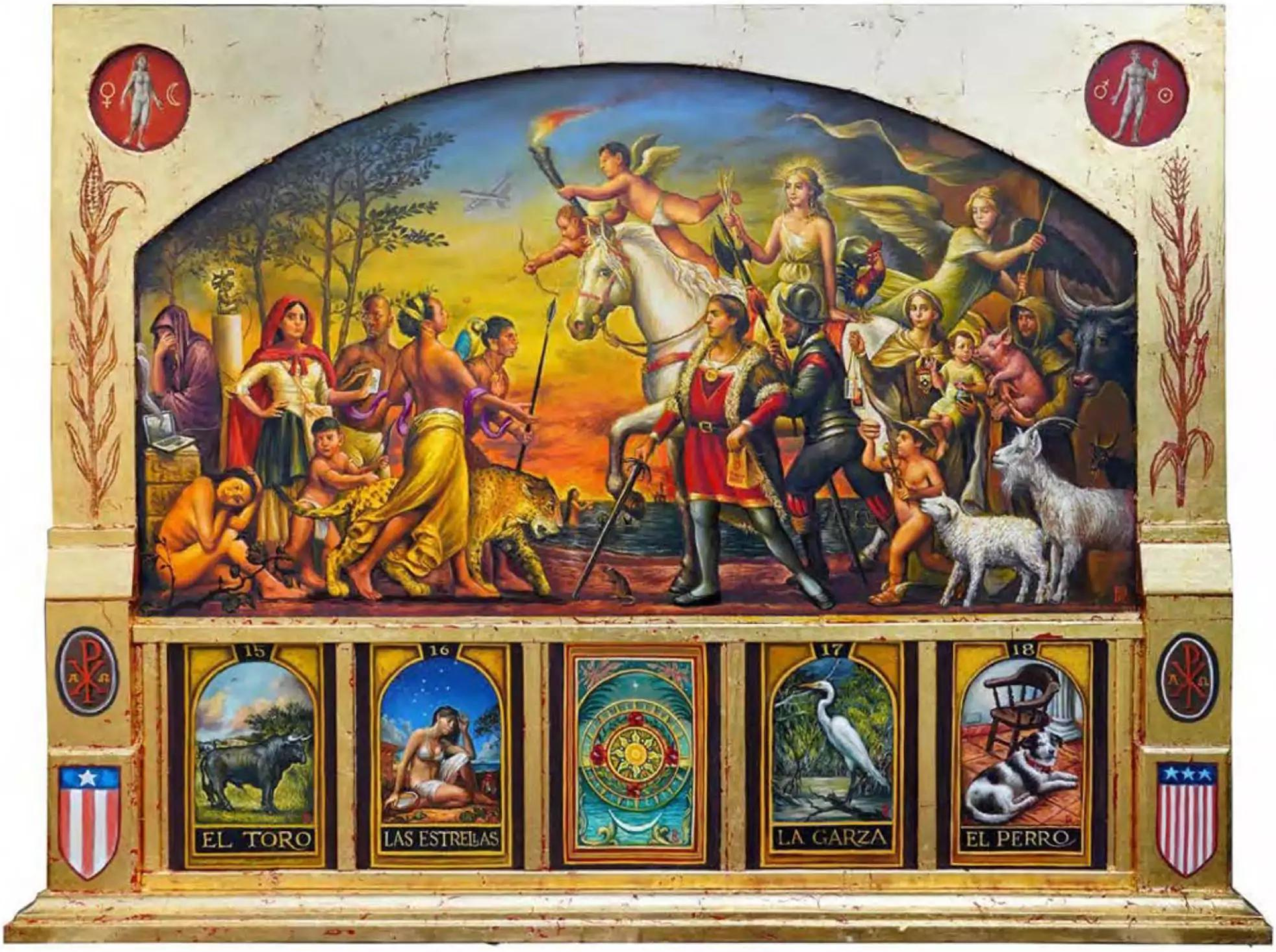
It's both an escape, but also, in a way, I think we take ourselves too seriously in this world that is so polarised between left and right. People become so stuck in their ways and so upset by their political and religious quarrels. This humour is a way of breaking down that wall of seriousness and breaking down the way we cling so tightly to our own beliefs, because we want to belong to a group, to a tribe.

So, in this case, it would be humour that makes you cry!

Yeah, that's good, and I understand what you're saying about the woke mentality. I'm very aware of it, and I play along with it and make fun of it too. In fact, I'm neither on one side nor the other; I see everything for what it is and find pleasure in it all.

76 Creatio, oil on canvas,
116.8 x 162.6 cm, 2019 →





In medieval times, there were men who travelled from village to village telling relevant stories or the news of the day. They were called juglares (in Puerto Rico, trovadores). Do you consider yourself a kind of juglar through your artistic production? Not just a normal artist, but someone who brings the news.

What you mention is important and relevant. It is a potential archetype of the work itself; it is the fool in the tarot. For me, this is the most important thing because we take things too seriously and get carried away by the gravity of things when we try to identify too much with one group or another. So sometimes we need an intermediary character or a bridge builder who doesn't take anything seriously. This archetype is the artist in many ways. He's supposed to be a little crazy. You have to be a little crazy. It's also a form of bravery. So you have to be a little insane to be able to tap into that source.

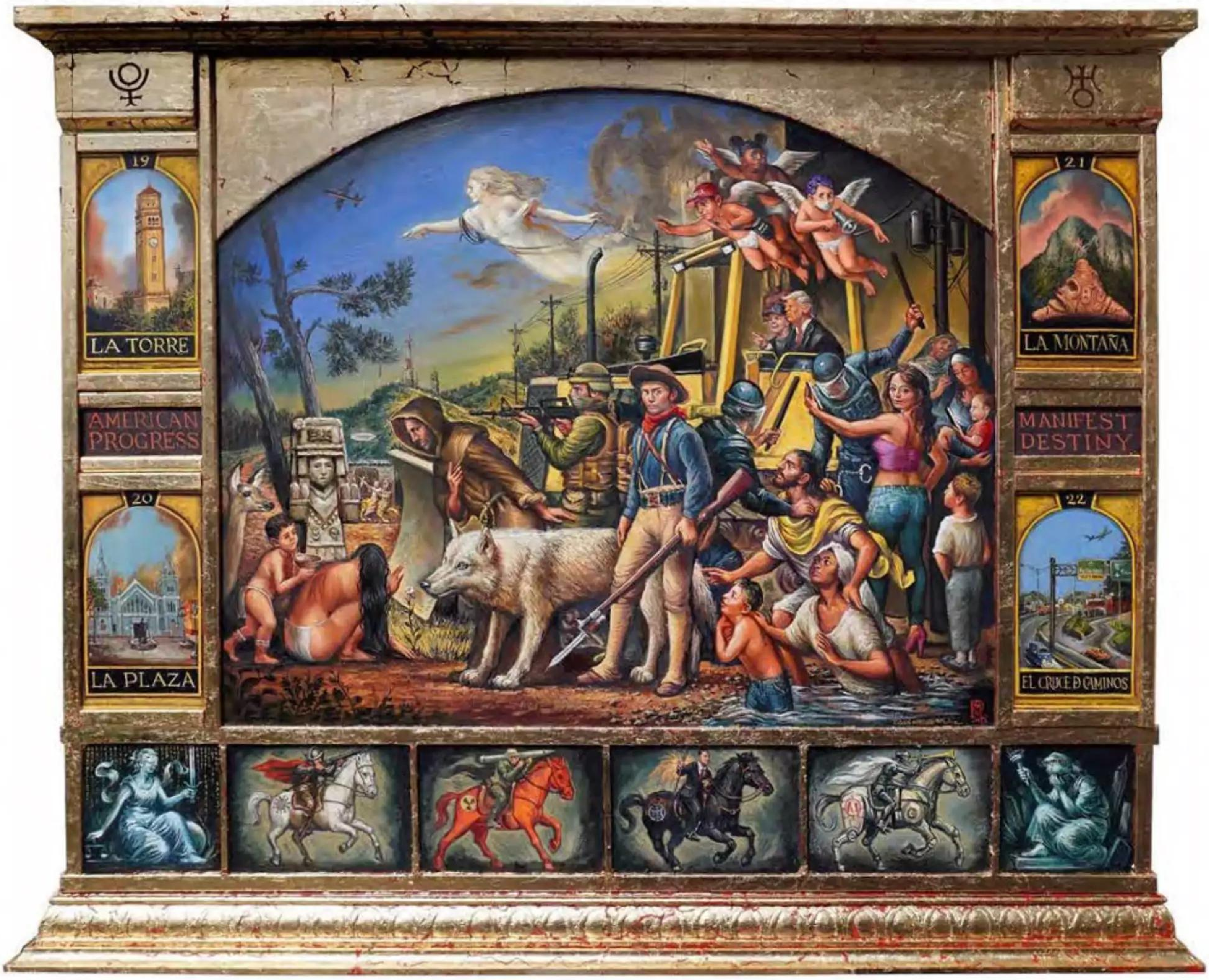
Let me clarify, I don't consider myself a journalist in any way, nor am I an activist. At least, that's not my intention. I'm not trying to change anyone's mind or follow slogans and protests against climate change, for example. That would be hypocritical of me since I drive a petrol car. So unless I can practise what I preach, I won't do it and I'll just be an artist. And I also think we're all in the same boat anyway.

Okay, so are there any questions I haven't covered or anything you you would like to share with the readers of Argument magazine?

Yes, my YouTube channel is called 'Art and Archetypes' because those are the two most important elements of my work. We may not have talked much about archetypes, but we find them in the timeless things of the past, in all the stories we have accumulated over the centuries, over the millennia of human history that we have lived through to this day. It's the common denominator that ties it all together. Archetypes are the colours on the palette, but also the hidden influences that I try to exploit in my work. If people are to take anything away from my art, it is that they should be more attentive to these hidden forces and develop an archetypal eye to identify what really lies behind everything that is at stake today. Not just in art, but in our daily lives.

Thank you for your time, Patrick. I had a wonderful time and hope to see you again soon.

Thank you. Thank you very much.



← **77** The Crossing (Verano), oil and metallic foil on polyptych panel, 121.9 x 96.5 cm, 2025

↑ **78** The Fall (Otoño), oil and metallic foil on polyptych panel, 121.9 x 104.1 cm, 2025

Dina Goldstein

Fatima Gholem

Dina Goldstein is a Canadian visual artist and photographer, born in 1969 in Tel Aviv, Israel, and based in Vancouver, British Columbia. She began her career over thirty years ago. as a photojournalist and documentary photographer before becoming an independent artist specialising in large-scale, highly conceptual narrative photographic tableaux.

Goldstein is best known for her provocative and meticulously crafted photographic series. staged productions, notably "Fallen Princesses" and "In the Dollhouse" and "Gods of Suburbia". His work draws on pop surrealism, blending cultural archetypes, icons and everyday scenarios to produce nuanced social commentary on the human condition, gender roles, consumerism, religion and the impact of the media and ideology on contemporary life.

Her most notable series, "Fallen Princesses" (2007-2009), attracted international attention by depicting princesses Disney characters confronted with real-world problems, thus subverting the narrative of 'eternal happiness'. Goldstein's art is recognised for its cinematic technique, her vivid images and exploration of social norms and belief systems. She has received numerous awards, including the Virginia Prize for Women Photographers and the Arte Laguna Special Prize, and her work is widely exhibited internationally.

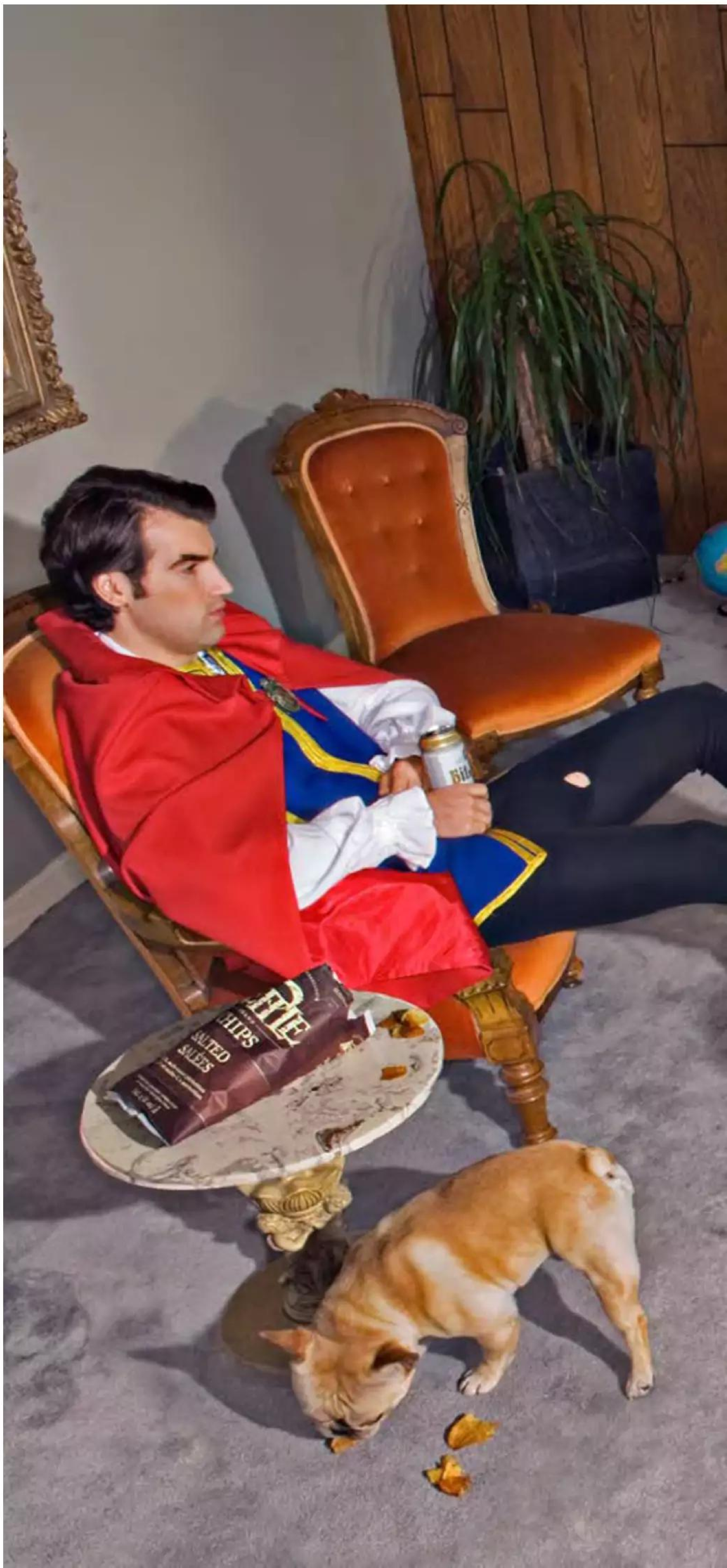
80 "Fallen Princesses". Snowy, digital photograph, 38" x 53", 2008

Dina, you have produced several photographic series. How does your work fit into the context of ancient and modern mythologies?

For me, it all started with Fallen Princesses in 2007, a work inspired by female characters from fairy tales, which were adapted from ancient mythologies and use similar narrative tools. These include archetypes, symbolism, drama and storytelling. I am greatly inspired by the works of Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Yuval Noah Harari and other authors who disseminate the nature of storytelling and the collective imagination throughout history.

Humanity's innovations and imagination have given rise to simple stories that have become increasingly complex. These man-made narratives encompass everyday life with religion, superstition, and rituals. Fairy tales and mythologies are understood in many ways, such as fantasies or psychic maps. They reveal a great deal about human nature and psychology. They are parables, educational stories, and tales that describe how to overcome obstacles and adversity.

The evolution of these stories over time and their propagation are at the heart of my thinking. I draw inspiration from characters who have found their place in our collective imagination. Placing these fictional entities in a contemporary context connects me to a collective unconscious that has been built up over the course of history.



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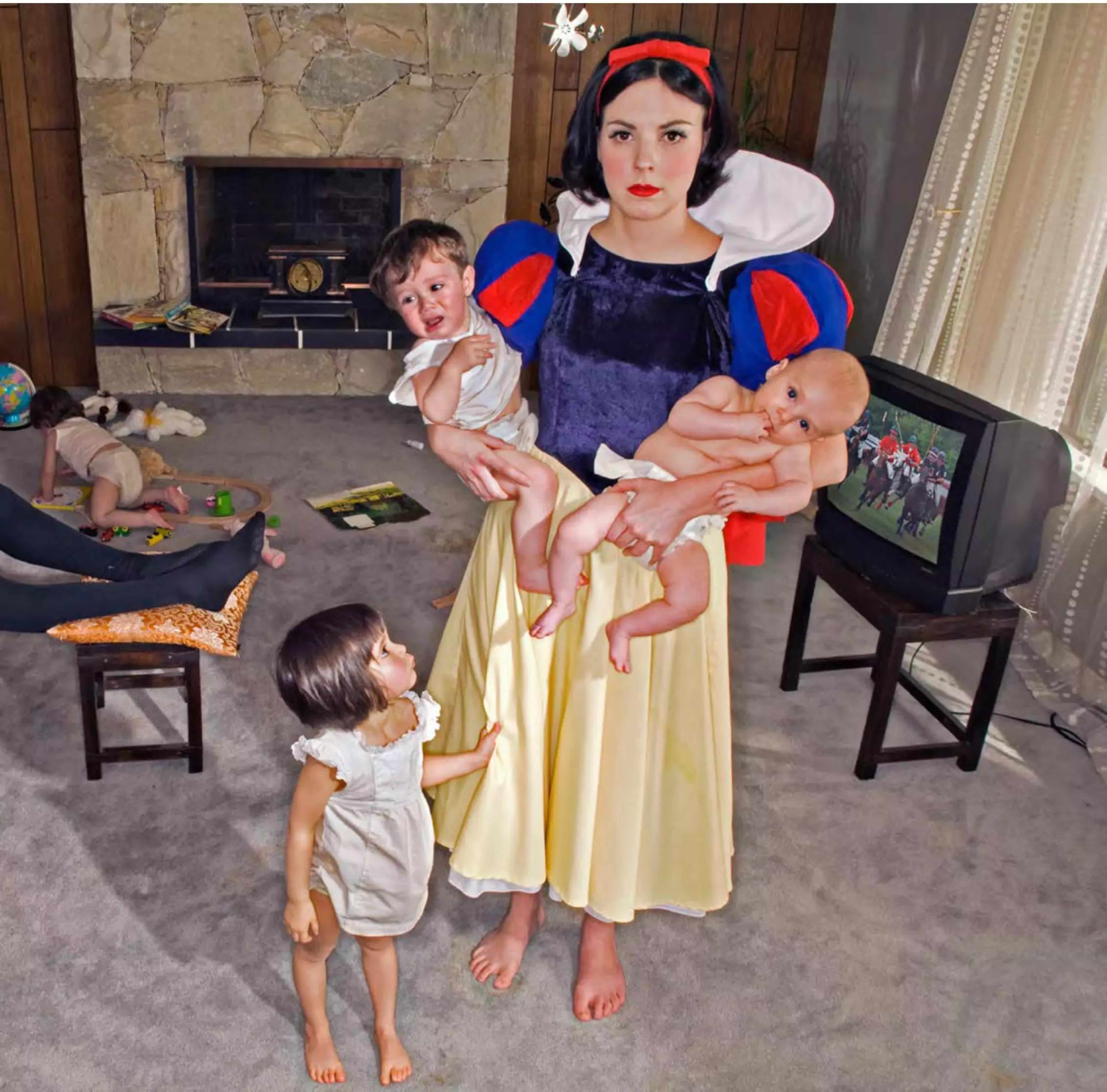
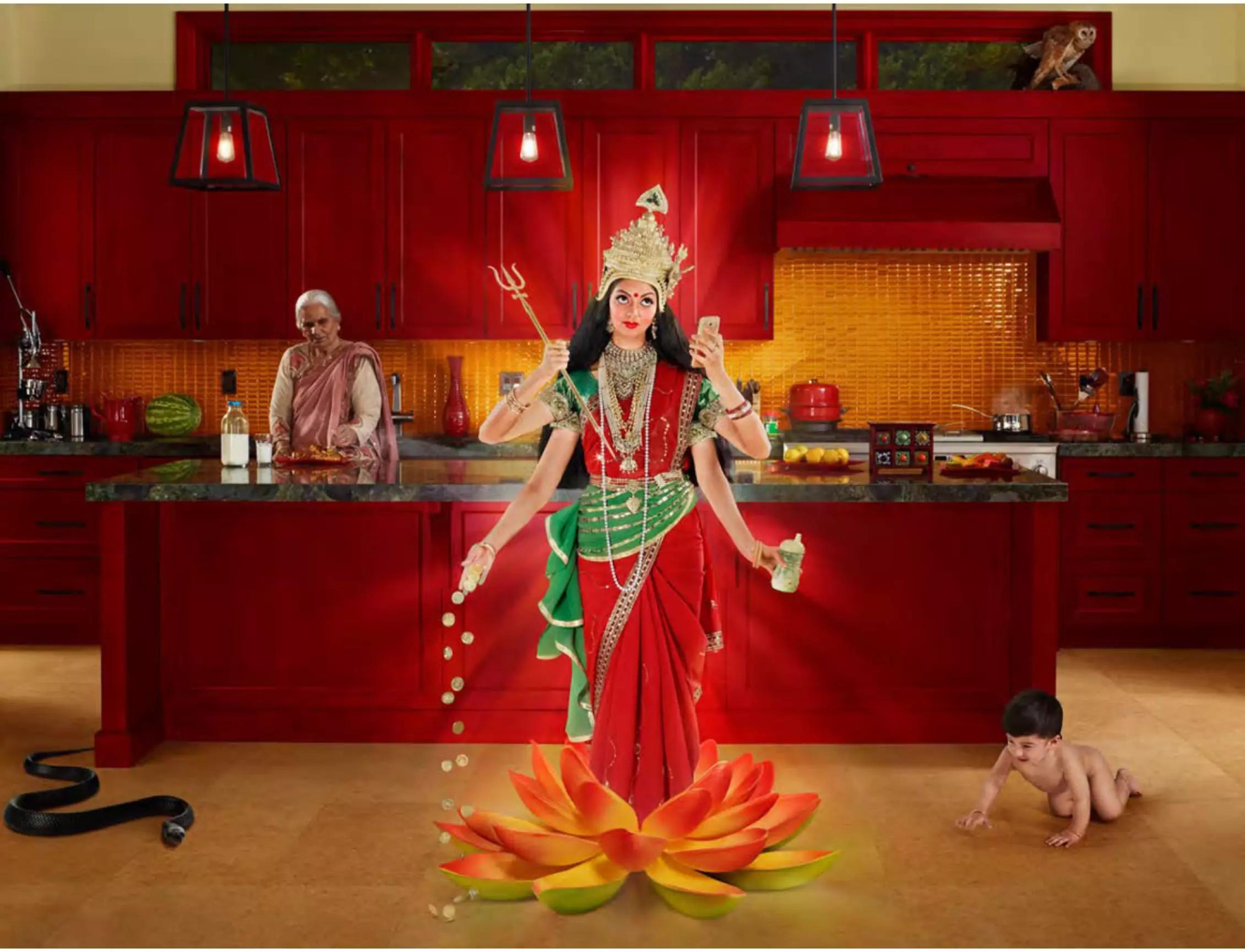




↑ **81** "Gods of Suburbia". Lakshmi, digital photograph, 39" x 50", 2014

-> **82** “Gods of Suburbia”. Ganesha, digital photograph, 39” x 50”, 2014

Can you tell us what inspired you to create your series "Gods of Suburbia", which transposes deities and mythological figures from various religious traditions into everyday scenarios in Western suburbs? How does "Gods of Suburbia" reinterpret ancient gods in modern contexts?

The inspiration for Gods of Suburbia came to me during my stay in India. In 2012, I won a prize in an international Italian competition that allowed me to spend three weeks in Mumbai. During that time, I had to create a series, but it wasn't that easy for me. My work relies on a team of artists to create complex tableaux, and I didn't have that team in India. I also didn't have my lighting equipment, only a small strobe light.

During most of my stay, I explored many of the city's less desirable areas. I didn't just visit the usual tourist sites, but went to the slums where a large part of the population lives. I also noticed that the city's inhabitants slept on the streets. In fact, many go outside to find some respite from the unbearable heat. I photographed women dressed in beautiful saris lying on the ground, taxi drivers, and book sellers asleep in the middle of the day. "Sleeping on Mumbai" took me out onto the streets.

It was there that I also noticed the great respect for rituals and spirituality, as well as the veneration of mythical figures. Hindus incorporate images of fictional characters (gods and demons), their origins and rituals into their daily lives. They appropriate a god and represent it through figurines, statues and shrines. These can be seen in homes and businesses. The stories themselves are fascinating and feature animals that change shape and talk.

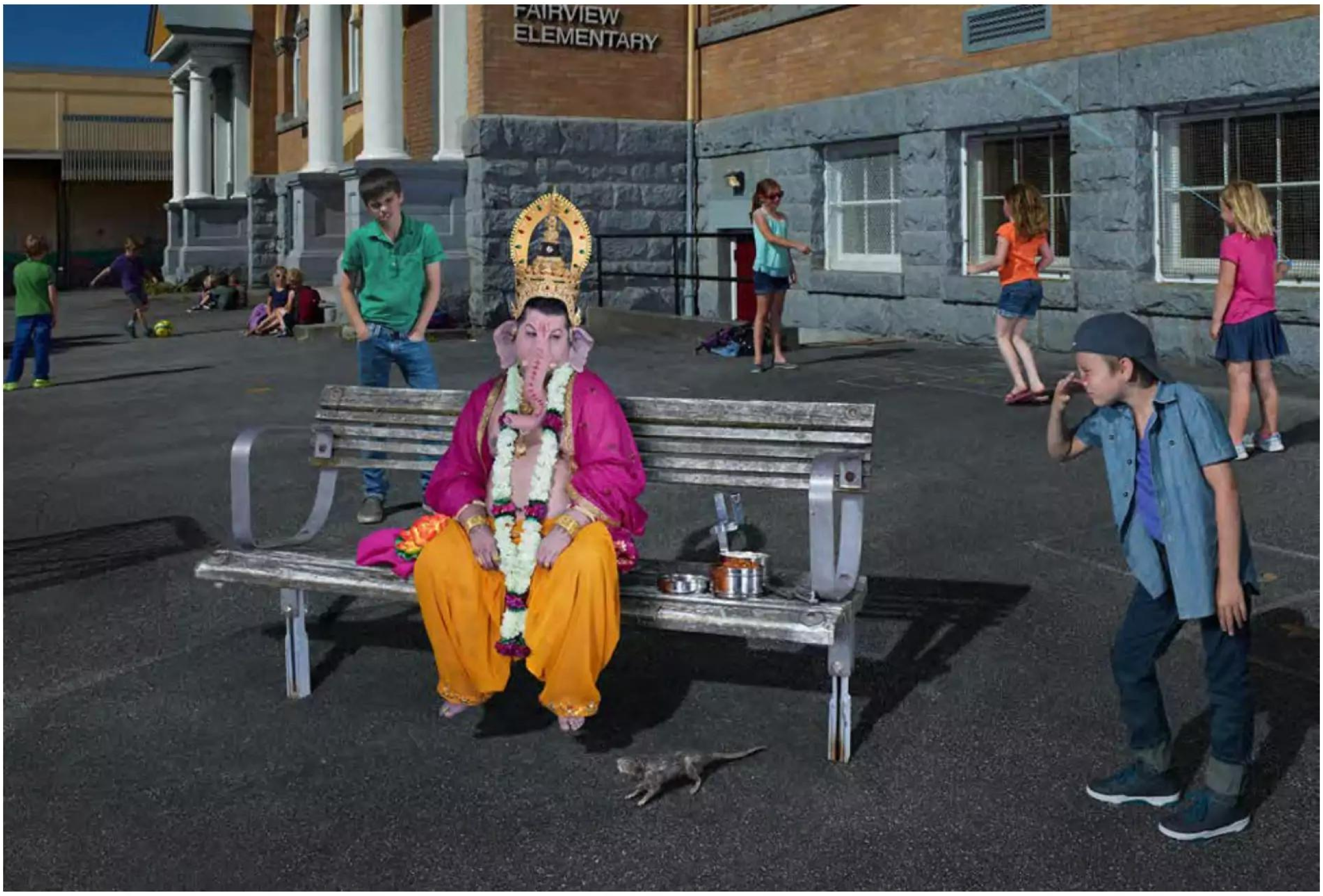
By the end of my residency, I had developed the concept of "Gods of Suburbia". My first ideas were Lakshmi and Ganesh. I purchased all the necessary costumes and props to bring back with me to Canada.

My concepts bring these fictional characters to life in modern life.

Lakshmi is depicted as a very busy mother and leader of her community. Even with her many arms, she is always overwhelmed by her tasks and commitments. Just like many working mothers today.

Ganesh sits alone on a bench in the schoolyard. He is different from the other children. From his elephant head and human body to the food he brings to school. He struggles to fit into Western society. This is actually my story as an immigrant to Canada. At the age of 8, I didn't seem so different from my new classmates, but I wasn't like the others; my culture was unique.

The series consists of eleven pieces. They include major religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, as well as more marginal belief systems such as voodoo and Scientology. The themes are reflections on belief systems that survive, and even thrive, in the contemporary world. Each painting addresses a narrative that seeks to understand our place and the anachronism of our current existence.



In Snapshots from the Garden of Eden, you reinterpreted characters such as Lilith, the Golem, and characters from lesser-known Jewish stories, transforming them into symbols that address current social issues and questions of identity and the persistence of mythological thinking. Do you think that ancient mythologies need to be revisited in order to be understood by today's audience?

Jewish tradition includes folk tales, fairy tales, and stories rich in supernatural and mystical elements from around the world. The best-known oral and written tradition is that of the Bible.

The princess in the tower is the first version of the famous tale of Rapunzel, which reminds us that fate is sometimes beyond our control. Lilith, the temptress, has been transformed into several characters in Jewish writings over the centuries. She has continually reinvented strong women by turning them into witches and femmes fatales. The story of the Golem, a supernatural creature resembling a block of stone and protector of the Jews of Prague, comes from Eastern Europe in the 19th century. This character is a representation of justice and vengeance.

Dreamlike landscapes and symbolism intertwined with paradoxes, irony and satire. Themes of fate, temptation, justice, wisdom, blind faith and circumstance are popular tropes. This remains true today.

&lt;- **83** "Snapshots from the Garden of Eden". The Tree of Knowledge, medium format digital photograph, 44" x 57", 2017

8**4** Snapshots from the Garden of Eden. Lilith as Sheeba, medium format digital photography, 44” x 57”, 2017

With Fallen Princesses, you revisited modern Disney mythology and fairy tales, placing them in realistic scenarios marked by adult problems: illness, addiction, family conflicts and social pressures. Was this an attempt to deconstruct pre-established gender roles? Was there a questioning of the lack of a female perspective in these tales?

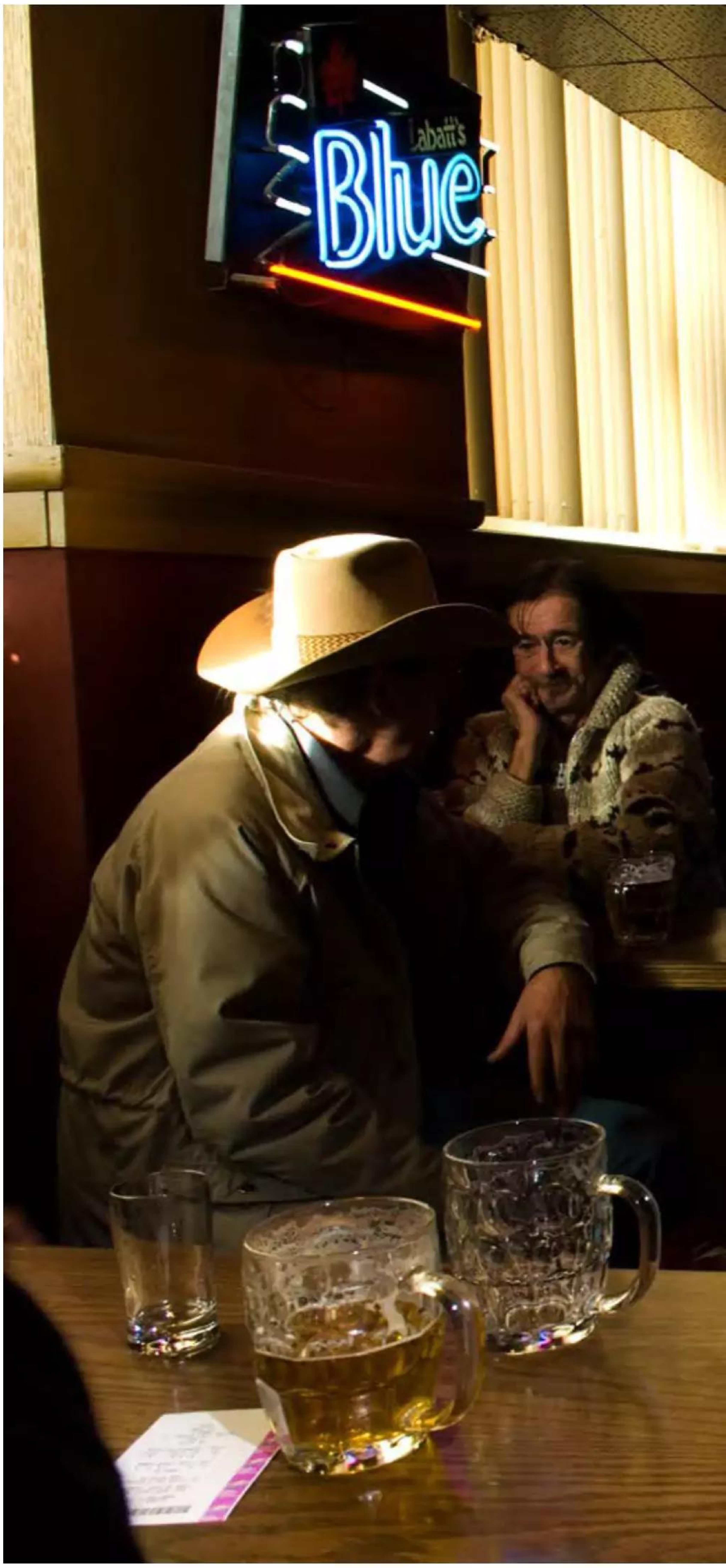
For decades, Disney found a formula that consisted of adapting popular fairy tales and "Disneyfying" them. It changed the original, sometimes macabre endings, replacing them with sugar-coated and always happy endings. Unfortunately, female characters were mainly portrayed as victims whose ambition in life was to marry a prince. The "Fallen Princesses" series was inspired by my young daughter Jordan, who became passionate about Disney princesses.

I then realised that these themes, which victimise young women and demonise older women, were outdated and needed to be challenged.

At the same time, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. So the first piece I created for this series was Rapunzel. She is sitting on a hospital bed, hooked up to an IV. She is bald and dejected, and next to her, a long braided wig lies on the bed.

This is the reality. So many people are suffering. Some survive, others do not. We have all lost someone to cancer.

Disney finally recognised this inconsistency and modernised its female characters. Girls are now portrayed as heroines, and love has been democratised in its stories. However, the "happy ending" remains very much alive.



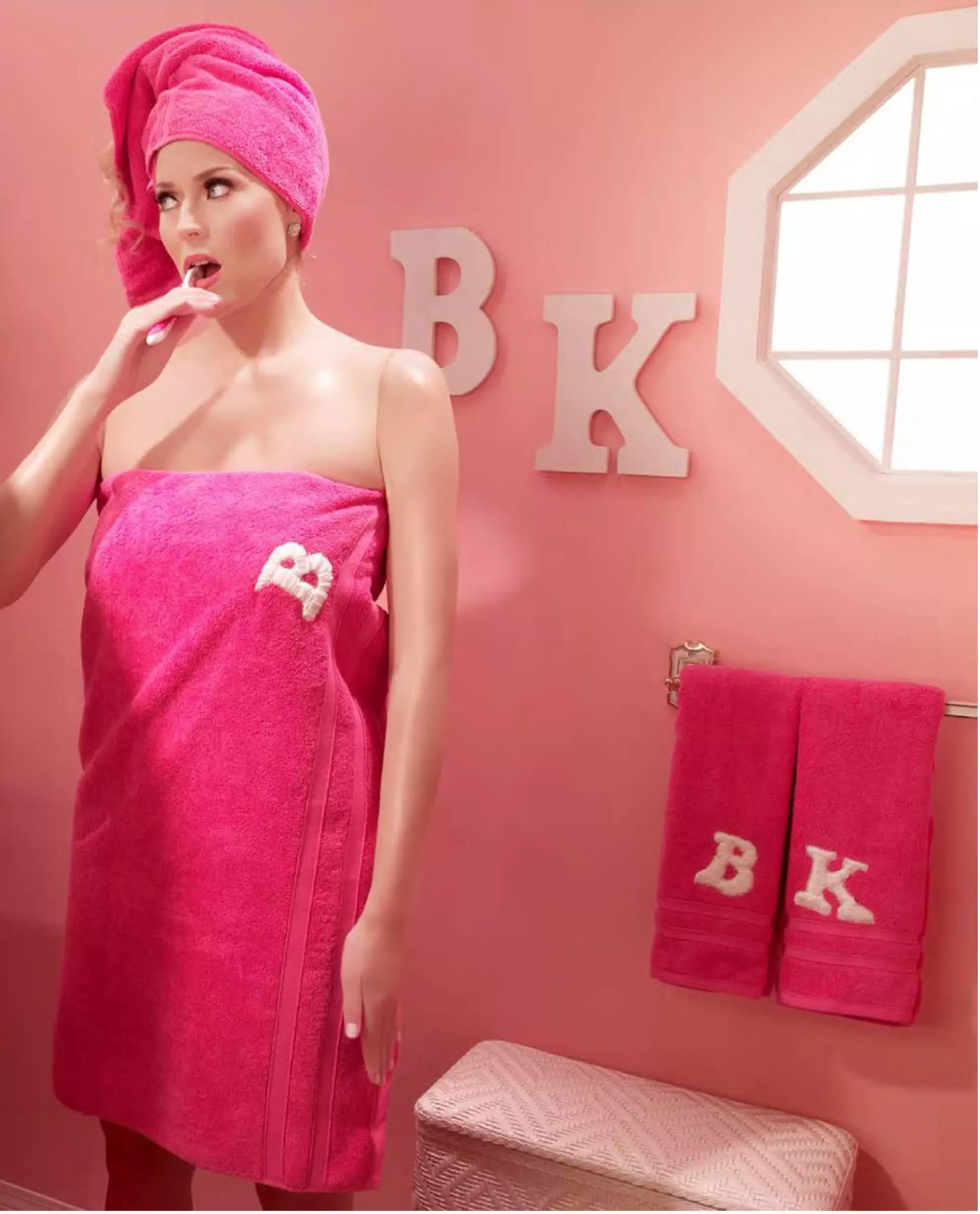
85 "Fallen Princesses". Cinder, digital photograph, 38" x 53", 2007

BAD BEAT
$2,510

In "In the Dollhouse" (2012), a series focusing on Barbie and Ken, icons of 20th-century commercial mythology, were you seeking to present the unattainable ideals of beauty and happiness in modern society?

Yes, we all grew up with Barbie. A plastic doll with long blonde hair and impossible proportions. Ken and Barbie are part of the collective memory of Western culture. Mattel and its brand became iconic in the 1950s and have dominated the doll market ever since, with thousands of versions. They were inspired by the real children of their creator, Ruth Handler, Ken and Barbie. They were brother and sister. Later, in the doll versions, Ken became Barbie's boyfriend and then her husband.

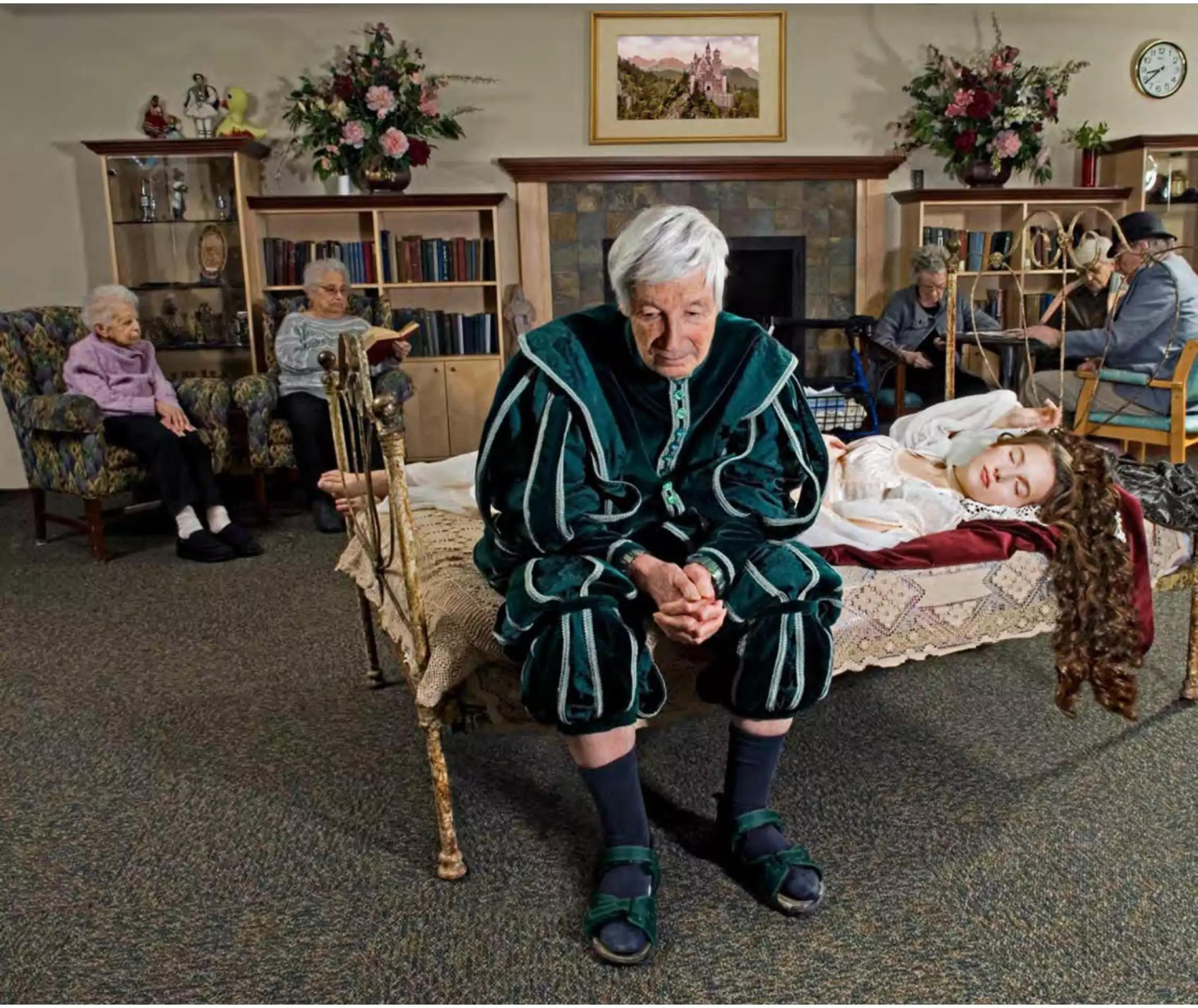
"In the Dollhouse" was inspired by my observations of my daughter Zoé and her friends playing characters and adopting gender identities during their games. Role-playing is something that is part of our childhood, but which we eventually abandon.



86 "In the Bathroom". Bathroom Mirror, medium format digital photograph, 44" x 56.5", 2012

I imagined that the dolls were real people, living together for decades in a perfect pink house, with Barbie always in the spotlight and Ken living in her shadow. I wanted to free Ken and see what would happen to Barbie when she realised that he had found his true identity. The series is a sequential narrative composed of ten images that unfold like a comic strip. However, the themes addressed in each image are serious, as Ken discovers his sexuality, while Barbie breaks down and cuts off all her hair.

The overall message is that perfection is possible, but it is not stable. It cannot be maintained. The nature of perfection is temporary and fleeting. Furthermore, living an authentic life can be more satisfying. And, of course, beauty is not necessarily a cure for happiness.



87 "Fallen Princesses". Sleeping Beauty, digital photograph, 38" x 53", 2007

In conclusion, what modern mythologies would our current society want to question or deconstruct?

Do you think they are now new gods worshipped by our society?

The new gods of Western society are money, fame and beauty. But also an ideal of beauty that has become widespread and erases all character and individuality. Reconstructing women's faces with surgery and injections to make them look more like dolls and less like human beings.

Modern mythologies are created on social media based on how people present themselves to others. Images are powerful tools that can be manipulated to distort reality. We first saw this with photo editing techniques, and now with AI. The danger of providing people with information through images that are not real and that can influence them is frightening.

Mythologies can turn into propaganda and misinformation. We will see this more and more often, because technology lacks morality, and the truth is increasingly distorted.

Modern mythology will create itself thanks to AI. What stories will it tell us? Will it be a combination of human imagination and that of AI?

We have fed the Internet monster for decades without any regulation. What was once a democratisation of information has been easily corrupted. Can we afford to let AI run wild and tell us stories that we will believe? Are we going to lose our ability to think critically?

Fatima Gholem

François Beauxis-Aussalet

Born in Paris and a graduate from the Sorbonne, Fatima Gholem worked in finance before embarking on a career in entrepreneurship. She is the author of two novels, including Les Cendres et les Papillons (2022). Fatima Gholem lives and works in the Basque Country.

88 Fatima Gholem, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, summer 2025

FATIMA GHOLEM
LES CENDRES ET LES PAPILLONS
À la recherche de ses origines
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FATIMA GHOLEM

Reading your novel Les Cendres et les Papillons (Ashes and Butterflies) introduces us to a heroine, Halima, who, in many ways, she resembles you. She confronts her family history and her personal wounds, but ultimately, after all these trials, she finds peace: can she be compared to a modern Psyche: unconscious resurgence or deliberate intention?

Comparing Halima, the heroine, to a modern Psyche is a relevant interpretation on several symbolic and narrative levels. In ancient mythology, Psyche embodies a human figure subjected to harsh trials that lead her, after much suffering, to a form of elevation, self-knowledge, and even inner healing. She is often depicted as a butterfly soul, with metamorphosis and movement constituting the essence of her initiatory quest.

However, Halima's life in the novel is fraught with trials and tribulations: confrontation with the violence of reality (terrorist attacks, the decline of Paris), the painful reunion with exile and dual cultural identity (French-Algerian), the weight of family secrets and the need to trace her origins in order to rediscover her unity. Like Psyche, she must confront her hypersensitive and raw vulnerability, multiply encounters and experiences that, at each stage, open a key to herself until the revelation of a family secret.

The very motif of the butterfly in the title and the story is undoubtedly significant. In Greco-Roman tradition, the butterfly symbolises the soul (psyche), capable of rising from the ashes after overcoming adversity. This is precisely Halima's journey, whose resilience leads her to solace and a form of peace after accepting her pain and her history.

Finally, while Psyche, in the fable, ends up uniting with Eros and being elevated among the gods, Halima achieves an intimate reconciliation: she no longer denies her wounds or her heritage, but transforms them to assert her dignity, her freedom, and her ability to love and live, "standing tall, dignified and proud". Halima thus embodies a contemporary figure of Psyche: a woman who, by passing through fire and ashes, finally gains her butterfly wings and peace of mind.

Is Halima a purely fictional, idealised character? We understand that you are very close! However, one is not the other... What autobiographical elements in your story are intertwined with fiction?

Like Halima, I am Parisian, French, and come from an Algerian immigrant family. I am preoccupied with questions of origin and identity: I constantly reflect on the issue of dual belonging and identity construction, a question that is central to Halima's journey in the novel. Like Halima, I reflect on the meaning and importance given to origins.

I have followed the same career path as my protagonist: I first worked in the finance sector, a demanding and competitive environment, before moving into freelance work focused on social impact and art. In the novel, Halima is also a young entrepreneur who has returned to Paris after a period abroad and is struggling with the challenges of professional and personal reintegration. This return to Paris was a confrontation with reality for me: just like Halima, who returns to Paris after exile, I probably had an idealised view of Paris, confronted with personal experiences related to returning to my home city, marked by the social realities and tragic events that have recently shaken France (terrorist attacks, social decline). Then there is my social and feminist commitment: I cannot stand injustice and have always been committed to supporting various causes, particularly women's rights, through my involvement in 100 Women in Finance and by speaking out on equal pay and the visibility of women in predominantly male professional sectors. My heroine Halima, who is hypersensitive, also faces violence and seeks to emancipate herself as a woman, reflecting a shared commitment to dignity, freedom and female resilience.

Finally, my inner journey and the search for meaning: Halima's journey is akin to deep introspection, a search for her history and peace of mind, which I myself highlight as the creative and thematic intention in this novel. The world fills her with despair; she is lucid about political issues and her powerlessness in the grand scheme of things, but she tries to change it anyway, through small actions.

In short, Halima and I share a dynamic that swings back and forth between the intimate and the universal, between the quest for identity and engagement with the world, which allows us to see Halima as a kind of literary alter ego for my work as an author.

← **89** Fatima Gholem, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, summer 2025

Art is important to you, and you have made it your profession. Can you tell us about your relationship with art and what it means to you?

Writing is a solitary activity where I can spend hours sitting in front of my computer. It is an exercise in introspection where you have to probe your emotions and bring back memories, but art, in my opinion, is the opposite. It forces me to go out, to visit a museum or gallery, and it forces me to step outside myself. Art is a source of joy, of discovering artists who evoke various emotions, such as wonder, amazement, and questioning of our societies. Art allows us to interact with others; it is a bridge to others. It encourages me to look at others and ask them, "And you, what do you see in it ? What does this work trigger in you?" It seemed obvious to me to make this one of my professional activities, either by promoting artists, organising exhibitions, or carrying out sponsorship missions for cultural foundations. Unfortunately, it is still difficult for an artist to make a living from their art and stand out from the crowd, whether in the contemporary art market or in the public domain, and I want to change that.

What inspired you to write this novel? How did writing it feel like a form of liberation for you?

Inspiration comes from two sources: a strong reaction to tragic current events and a deep desire to understand and convey the complexity of my family identity, marked by cultural diversity, secrets, and resilience in the face of adversity.

The violence of the 2015 attacks prompted me to question my roots and the notion of identity, leading me to trace my own Franco-Algerian family history in the context of a Paris in mourning, where suffering, heritage and the search for meaning intertwine. The main character, Halima, faced with disillusionment and identity crisis, embodies this quest which, according to critics,
"feels authentic" and addresses resilience in the face of life's trials and collective history. Writing is a form of liberation because it allows me to express myself authentically, especially as a woman. Women's voices are still under-represented today in the media, cinema and public spaces. A novel gives me the opportunity to express my ideas, share my experiences, and also describe my frustrations or feelings of injustice in certain situations I have experienced.

LES CENDRES ET LES PAPILLONS
À la recherche de ses origines
IMA GHOLEM

What were your writing choices?

I wanted to place the concepts of transmission and introspection at the heart of the story. The narrative gives prominence to inner reflection, the search for self, and the exploration of the legacy – often silent, sometimes burdensome – that we receive despite ourselves, and which we must embrace in order to regain control of our destiny. It therefore seemed natural to me to use the first person, which is the only way to convey the depth of these intimate journeys. I opted for direct, refined language in order to preserve the fluidity of the reading and remain as close as possible to the emotion. Through this voice, the deeply personal family history finds its resonance in the greater history, anchoring itself in collectively shared events.

What role does writing play in your life today?

Writing plays an essential role in my life – it is its guiding thread, its foundation and its driving force. Everything around me becomes material to feed a story in the making: a conversation overheard between friends, an unexpected encounter, a haunting melody, a memorable film, a work of art. I let myself be swept away by exhibitions, contemporary art festivals, plays and street performances – all vivid sources of inspiration that awaken, stir and move me. Every emotion aroused becomes a pretext for creation, for transmission. Because for me, writing is not only about giving shape to what lives within me, but also about seeking to describe the world, to share it, to turn it into a space for sensitive dialogue with others.

← **90** Fatima Gholem,
Saint-Jean-de-Luz,
summer 2025

You are sensitive to issues such as identity and origins, social relations, inequality, violence and war, the role of women, the search for meaning, loneliness, and the issue of exile and migration. Which authors do you admire and find inspiring, and who would you mention for each of these themes?

I have read a lot of Yasmina Khadra, particularly What Do Wolves Dream Of? and The Attack, which deal with terrorism, and What the Day Owes the Night, about French Algeria. Amin Maalouf is another author I admire. I have read and reread Les Désorientés, which deals with the subjects of war in the Middle East, exile and friendship. Among female authors, Leïla Slimani is a source of inspiration. Her novel Chanson douce, which deals with issues of class violence, made a big impression on me, as did Virginie Despentes' Vernon Subutex trilogy, which follows the downfall of a man in Paris. English-language authors such as J. D. Salinger, Hemingway, Henry Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, and Virginia Woolf have also influenced my work and fuel my reflections on the violence of social relationships, wandering, and loneliness.

What would you like your readers to take away from your book after closing it?

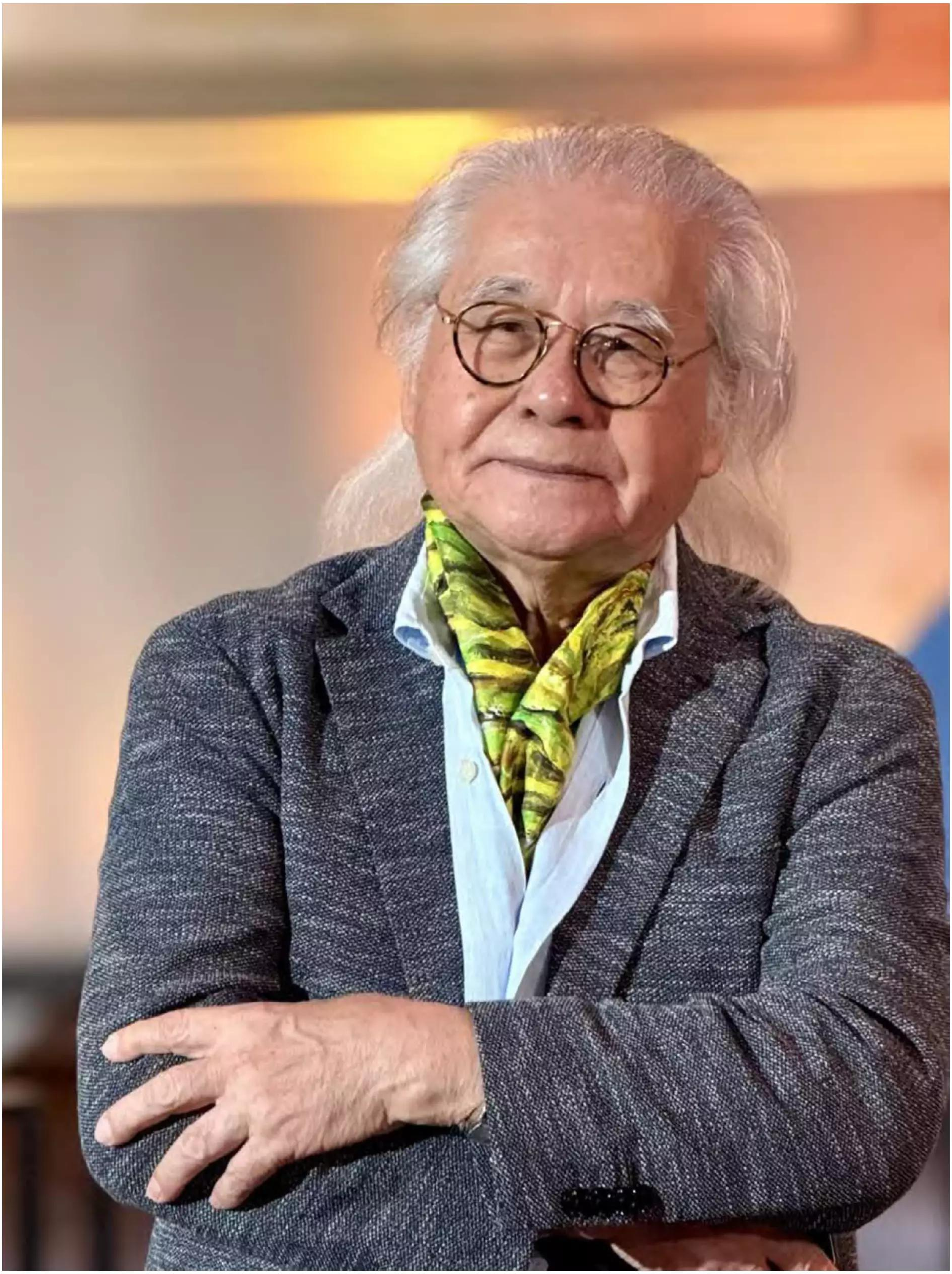
I would like my readers to close the book with their hearts awakened, driven by a quest for intimacy and filled with deep, lasting emotions. I want them to carry within them the spirit of shared resilience, an awareness of common possibilities, and to question how we construct ourselves in a world steeped in uncertainty and fear, but also in light and solidarity. I would like them to come away with a fierce desire to reject any reductive labels, to claim the richness of their complexity, to inhabit a fluid, shifting, plural identity – an identity that they can freely shape and redefine over time and throughout their lives.

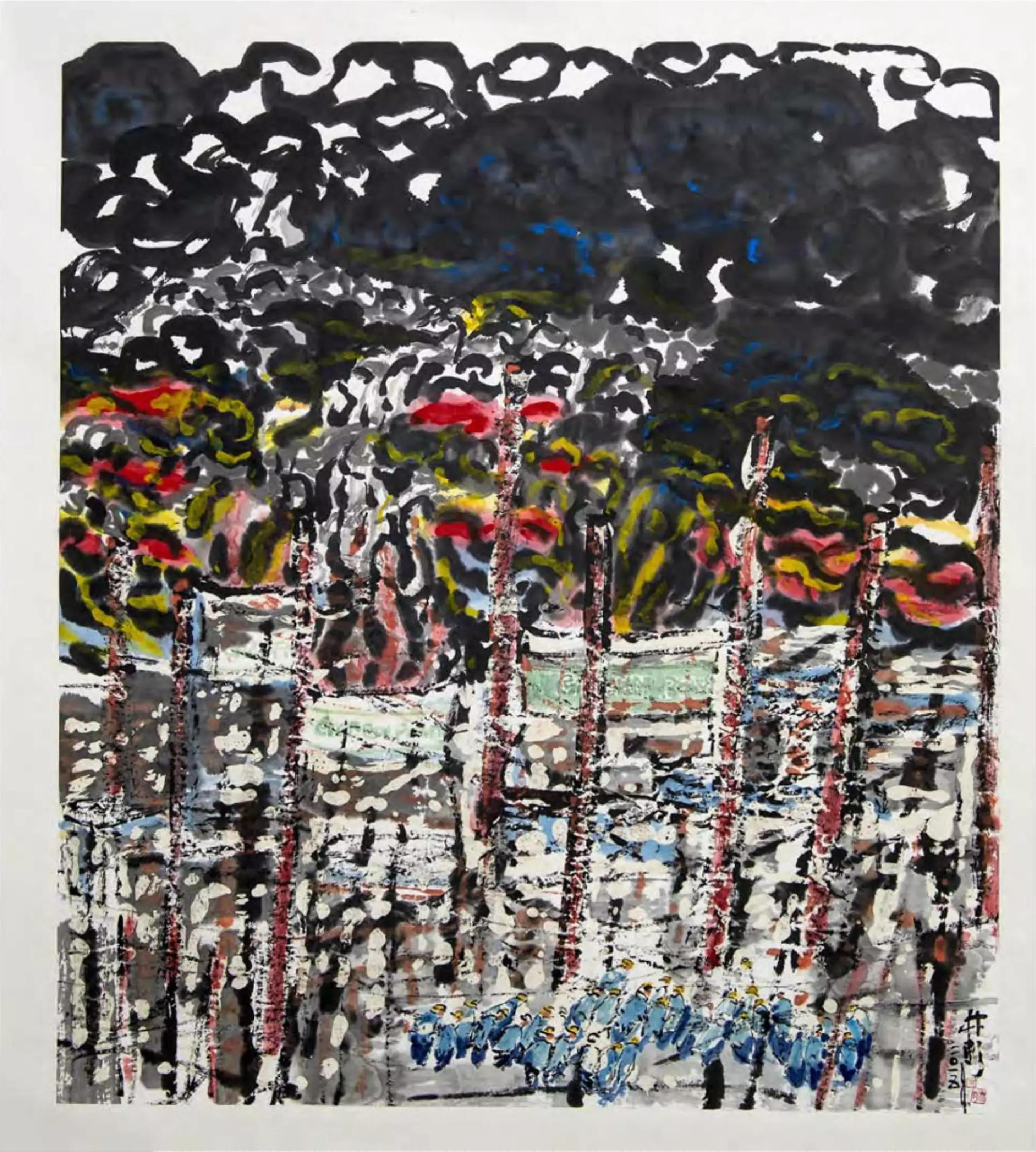
Lin Xiang Xiong

Pho Kim Chi

Painter, humanist, author, architect, accomplished businessman, but above all, a passionate advocate for peace. He alerts us to the dangers of war, poverty and environmental disasters.
His artistic universe becomes a vibrant call for peace, a peaceful dialogue between human beings, but also with what lies deepest within each of us.
He designed and built a museum entirely devoted to peace on the island of Penang in Malaysia, which will open on 14 December 2025.

91 Portrait of the artist →





↑ **92** Prices Paid for Industrialisation,
ink and colour on paper,
97 x 110 cm, 2015

Are you launching the first edition of Art for Peace? What is this award?

This is my appeal to artists around the world. We artists must awaken the collective consciousness. Our expressions must inspire people to unite against war, reduce economic inequality, eliminate poverty and stop the destruction of our planet. We must build a sustainable global village, rediscover a spiritual community and build universal peace.

Through my paintings and writings, I want to show the world what is really happening, for example, what happened in Gaza, or in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These are human tragedies. A year ago, Raza was a beautiful and lively city. Today, everything is destroyed, children are being killed.

Faced with this inhumanity, I wonder why human beings want to dominate each other instead of living together. What can I do? I am just an artist, and I hope that through art and cultural dialogue, we can change attitudes. By sharing our cultures, our economies, our values, we can defuse conflicts. Let us look around us: so many people live in the shadows, forgotten. Meanwhile, others lead comfortable lives, never thinking about those who suffer. What can the marginalised do? I have thought about this constantly, day and night. How can we stop war? It is a difficult question. Perhaps impossible in my lifetime. But if no one stands up to speak out, then history is likely to repeat itself over and over again. I have had a fortunate life. Others are suffering. It is our duty to help each other.

That is why I want to create an Art for Peace Award. I need artists by my side, allies. Together, we can be stronger. Day after day, more and more of us will join this cause. We artists can objectively reveal the misery that exists, show that the lives of countless people are sacrificed for the benefit of a privileged few.

How can an artist use their art to promote peace and raise awareness about violence in the world?

I believe that artists are often perceived as weak and insignificant in the face of the powerful or the wealthy. Yet we possess a treasure: our hearts, our sincerity. That is where we can take action. We must unite, writers, musicians, painters, visual artists.

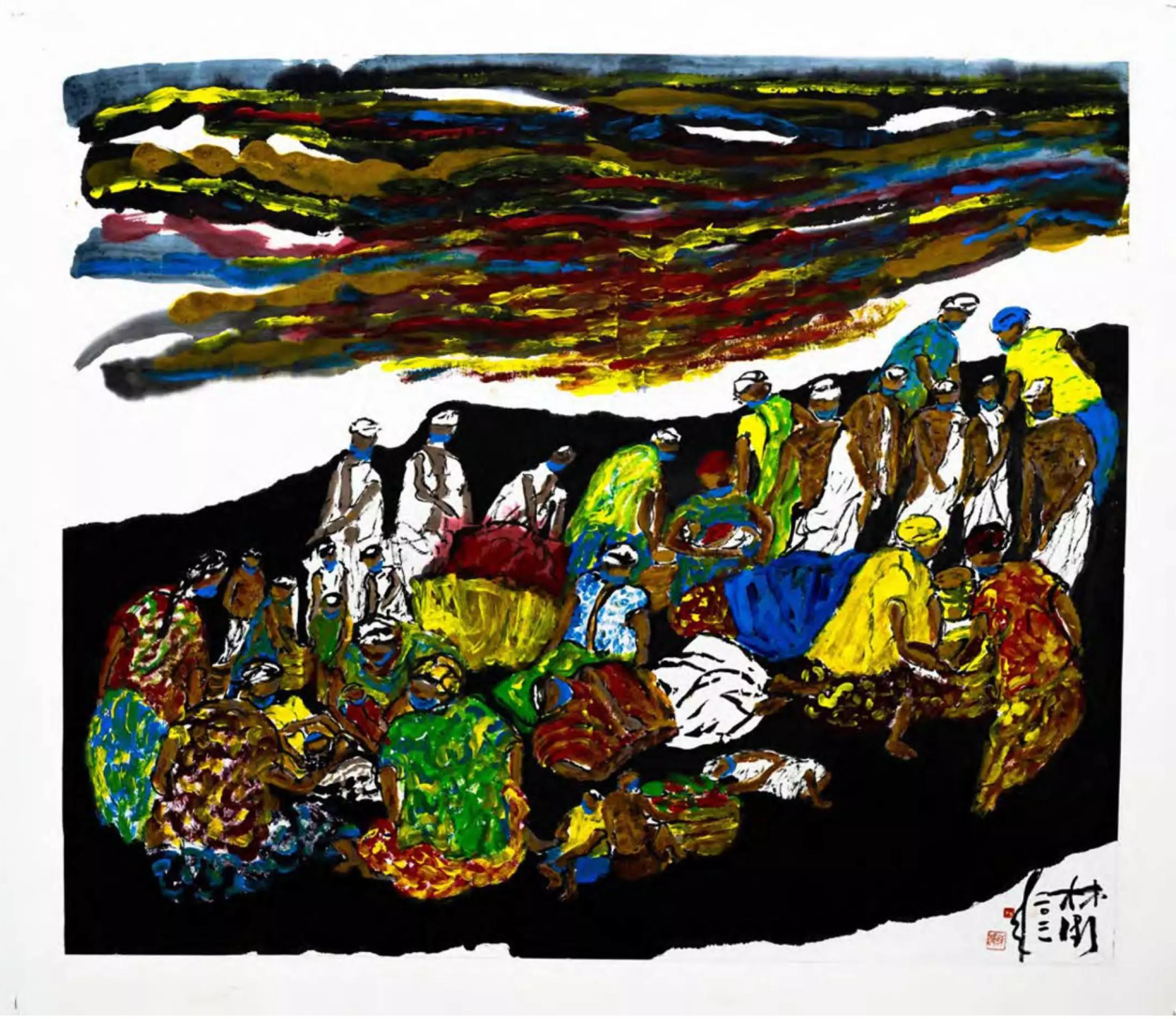
That is why I came to Paris today: to show my photographs, bring artists together, and raise our voices for peace.

Is it possible to end the war? Yes, I believe so. It will take time. But I am convinced that it is possible. Through dialogue, sharing, and meeting. Perhaps then we will dare to ask the real question: why fight? Why not sit down and talk?

Si vis pacem, para bellum "If you want peace, prepare for war." Do you agree?

It is true that throughout history, war has sometimes been necessary to restore peace. As UNESCO has pointed out, wars begin in the minds of men. It is therefore time for us to fight the opposite battle: one that aims to protect peace where it all begins, in our consciences. In 2016, I was deeply moved by a major art exhibition bringing together China and Belgium. It is in this spirit that I continue to write and create for peace. It is the guiding principle behind everything I do.

From a very young age, I understood that if I became an artist, I would lead a difficult life. I would live without comfort, struggling every day, bearing the weight of an anxious society, surrounded by distress, in a world populated by billions of human beings. For human passions – greed, pride, thirst for power – always demand more. Countries still seek to expand their territory and exploit resources, as in colonial times. This reality makes me deeply sad.



Your childhood was marked by pain. Is it this suffering that guides your commitment to peace today?

My life has been a succession of suffering. I was born in China in 1944. In 1945, when the Communist regime came to power, my father fled alone to Singapore, abandoning my mother, my two sisters and me.

When I was nine years old, my mother was killed. This tragedy changed me forever. I remember spending a whole week sleeping by a rice field, without eating, living only on a few wild herbs.

At the age of 11, I decided to join my father in Singapore. It was 29 November 1956. But there, life with him and my stepmother was marked by violence and injustice. Finally, I found refuge with my grandmother.

At the age of 15, in order to survive, I took on a series of odd jobs while attending evening classes at the Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore. People liked my work. They bought it.

Thanks to this, my grandmother and I were able to escape poverty.

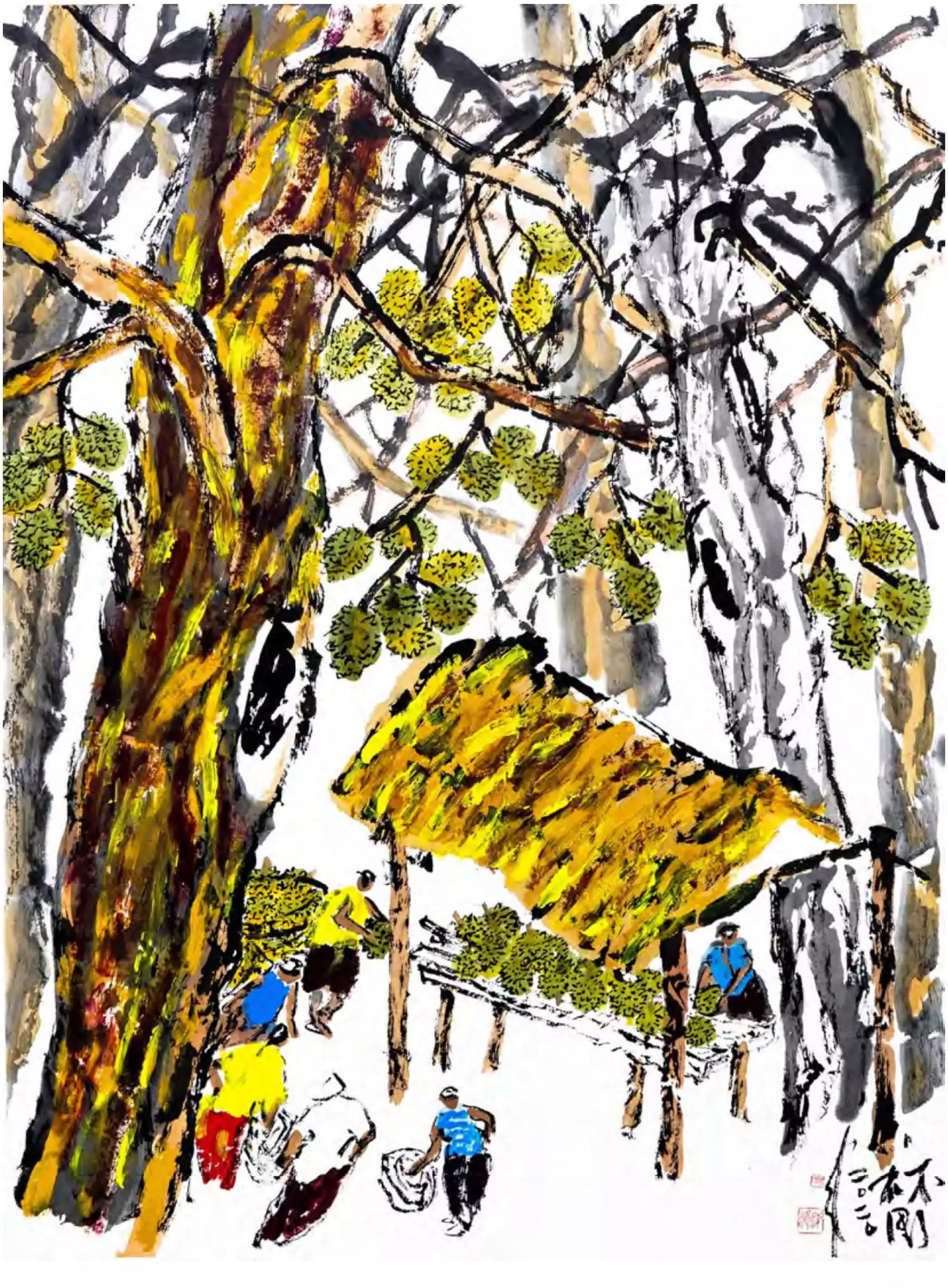
In the 1970s, I had the opportunity to come to Paris to study fine arts. But even there, life was a constant struggle. I met many people there who had also experienced trauma. I am happy to still be alive. But everything I went through profoundly changed the way I paint.

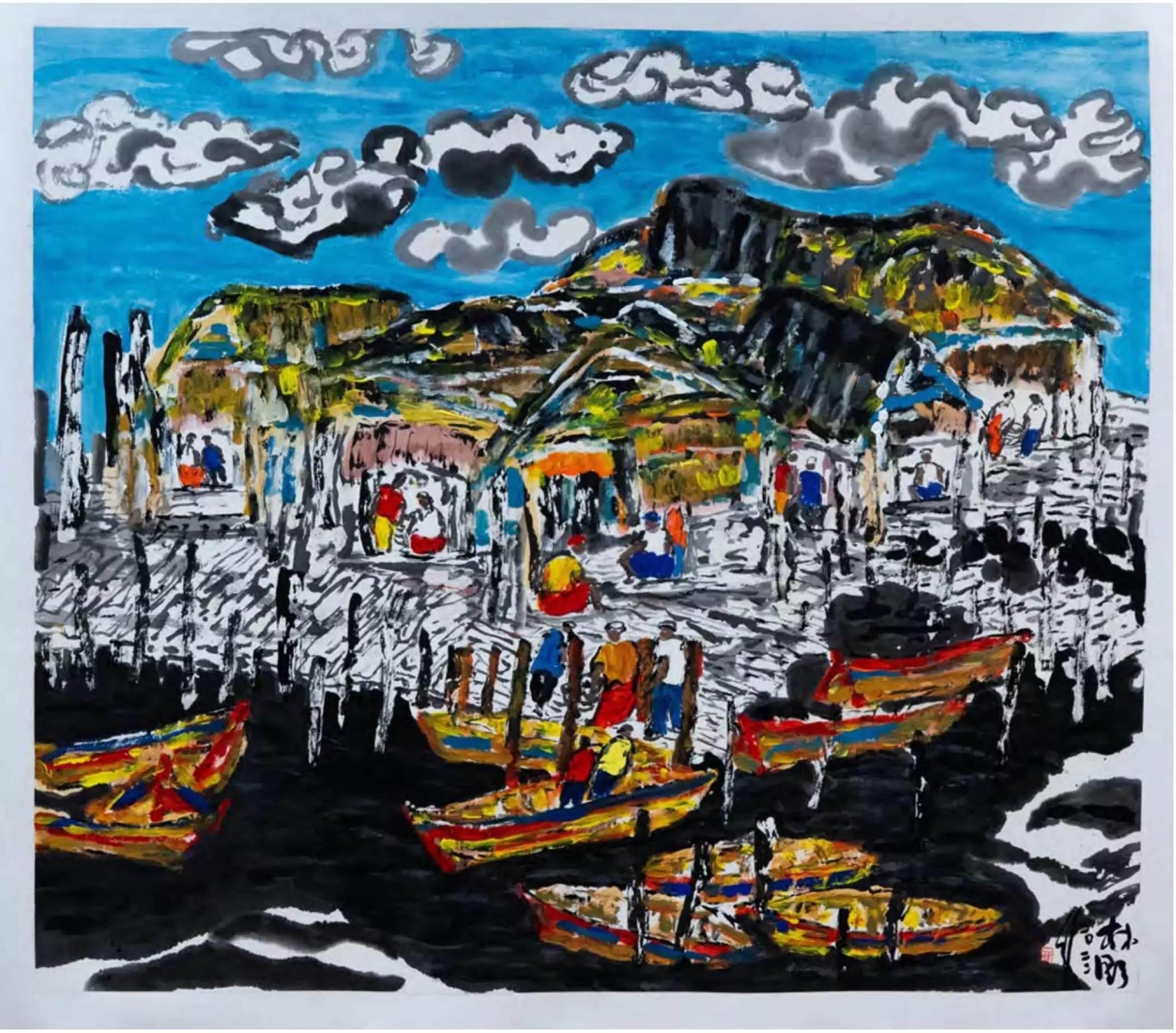
When I was young, I painted lots of animals: horses, cows, chickens, sparrows... But when I returned to Asia, I questioned the true role of an artist. It's not just about creating beautiful works to sell. Being an artist also means looking at the world with clarity, reflecting, and communicating.

My painful childhood gave me the strength to get back on my feet. But it was human suffering, war, poverty and environmental disasters that awakened in me a deep desire: the desire to seek peace.

← **93** Life's Encounters, ink and colour on paper, 113 x 97 cm, 2021

94 Selling Durians on the Spot, ink and colour on paper, 72 x 97 cm, 2020 ↓





↑ **95** Chaotic Clouds Cover the Fishing Village, ink and colour on paper, 111 x 97 cm, 2022

Your work combines Eastern techniques from the Nanyang school with Western traditions of oil painting. How does this artistic fusion manifest itself in your work?

Throughout my life, I have sought to build bridges between East and West, in aesthetics, thought, but also in business.

In painting, I first depicted traditional landscapes: plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums... then scenes inspired by everyday life around me. I then discovered Western painting, watercolour, then oil painting, which I deeply wanted to integrate into my artistic approach.

Why don't you want to sell your paintings?

Because my paintings are not commercial. No one really wants to buy this kind of work. They do not represent beauty or luxury, but poverty, people's pain, their suffering. I would like to raise awareness through a form of miserabilist art. I have painted ruined urban landscapes, devastated houses, starving cattle, destroyed rubber plantations, workers in extreme conditions and the poverty of African peasants.

When I was young, I was very poor and had to sell my artwork to feed my grandmother and myself. But today, thanks to my professional success in business, I am no longer forced to depend on my paintings to make a living.

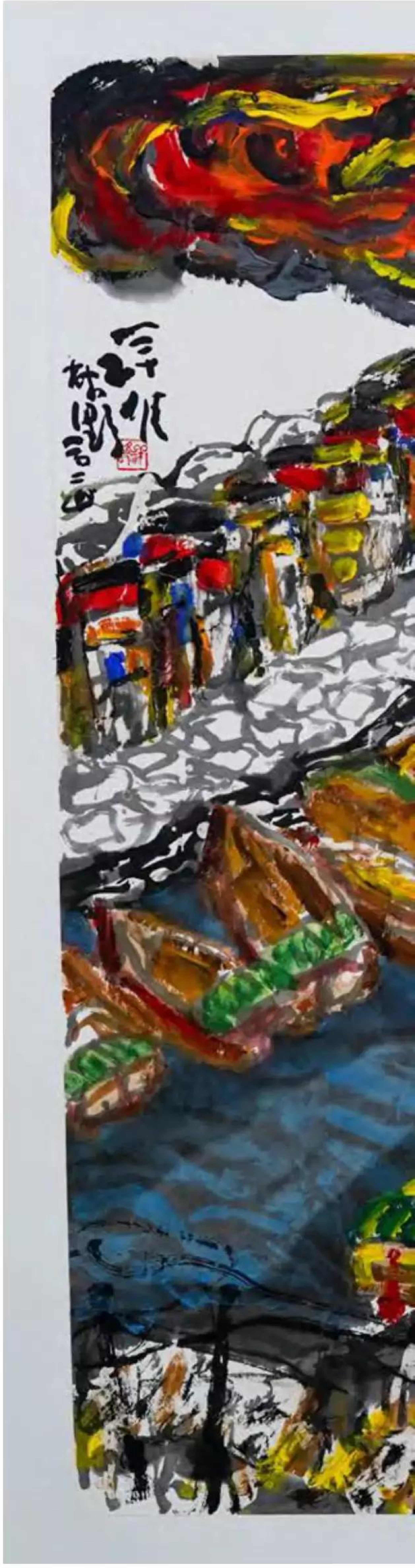
For me, art is an integral part of my life. For thirty years, I have been painting the living conditions of the most disadvantaged. What I depict is not imaginary, but a social reality, sometimes brutal. My works tell a story; they bear witness to war, climate change and human history. They are fragments of my memory, reflections of our society. That is why I want to preserve them and show them to the world: this living memory, this lived history, from the 20th to the 21st century.

As an artist, I have a responsibility: to express a message of peace through my art. My painting is at a crossroads: I have mastered a solid technique that allows me to represent the real world, but my goal is to elevate it to something deeper, a philosophical and spiritual reflection, to express emotions and touch people.

However, if one day someone wishes to acquire my paintings, on condition that they are exhibited to the public in a spirit of sharing, to spread a message of peace, then I will agree to part with them.

And what will you do with the money from this potential sale?

I will set up a foundation to support young artists, because artists are human beings too: they must be able to live with dignity. If they no longer have to worry about the commercial side of things, they can tell the story of the world, raise awareness and contribute to a more peaceful world.



During your visit to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, you said that his greatest misfortune was not having seen the museum dedicated to him. You, on the other hand, will see yours. How do you feel about that?

I am a fulfilled man.

I own a gold mine. But I consider this wealth to be a gift from heaven. It is not meant for me. It is a means, a tool to support artists and build a museum dedicated to peace and humanity.

I aspire for my museum to become a platform that promotes harmony between cultures and peace through art on a global scale. This place will become a true global platform for peace, a space where artists from around the world can meet, engage in dialogue, create, and convey a universal message of brotherhood.

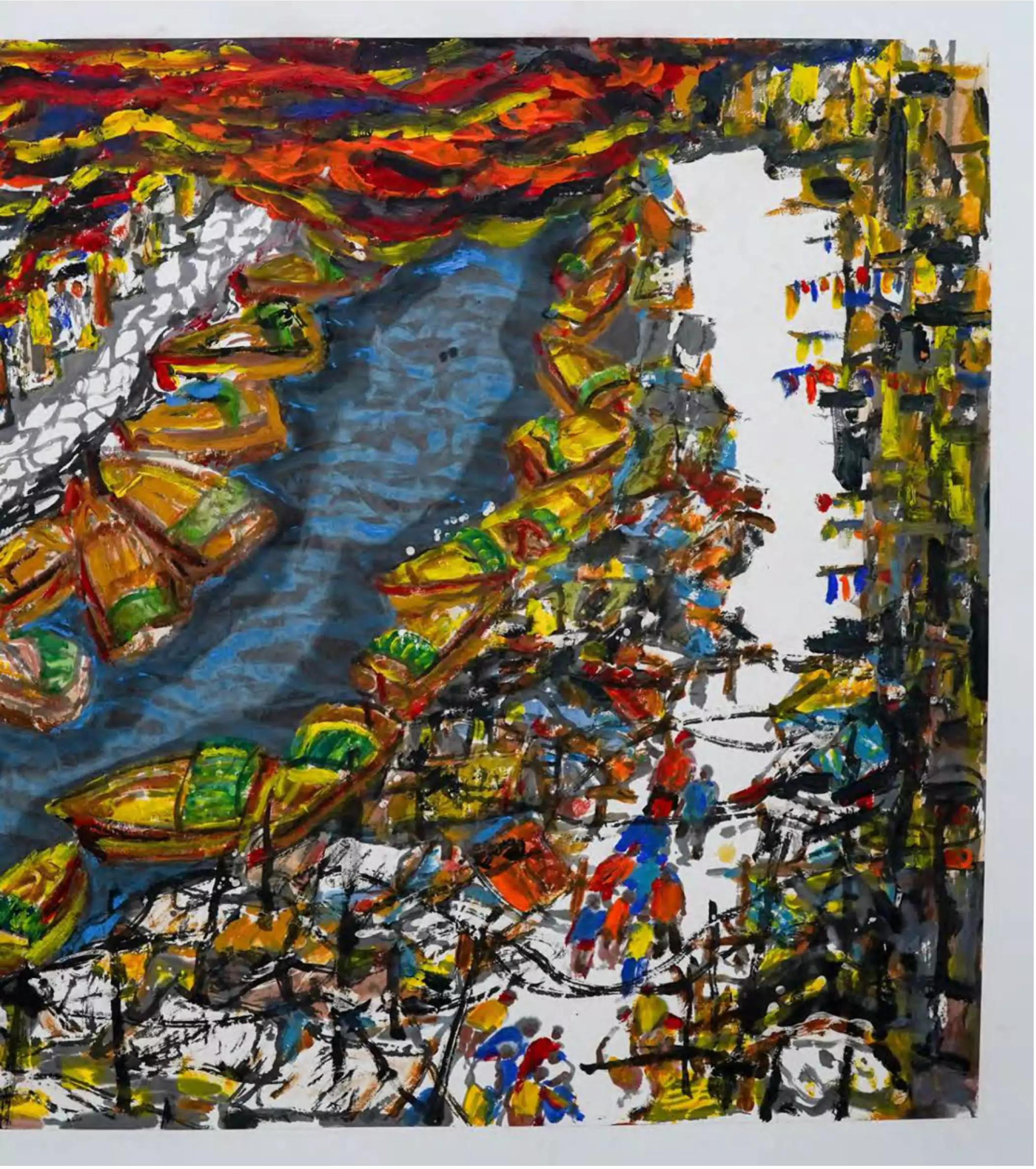
In this museum, you will be exhibiting 300 of your works, as well as works by other artists, all devoted to the theme of peace. Why the number 300? Does it have a special meaning for you?

This figure is provisional. It will depend on the space available in the museum. The inauguration is scheduled for 14 December 2025. Between now and then, thanks in particular to the Art for Peace competition, the final number of works on display will change.

Do you have a lucky number?

Yes, 99. In Chinese, its pronunciation evokes the idea of a long and peaceful life.

96 Memories by the Singapore River (II), ink and colour on paper, 115 x 97 cm, 2024 ↓



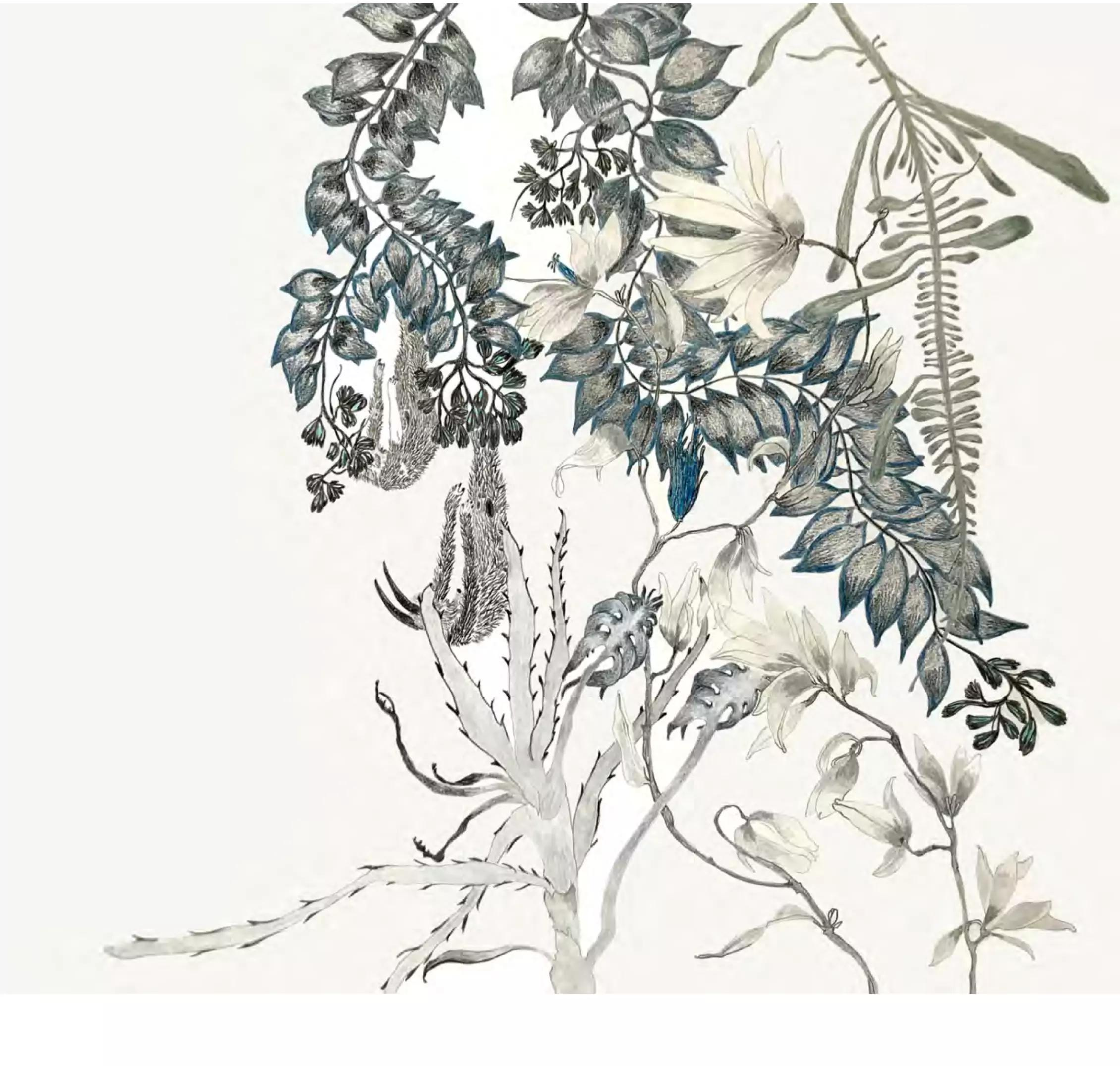
Helen Barrier

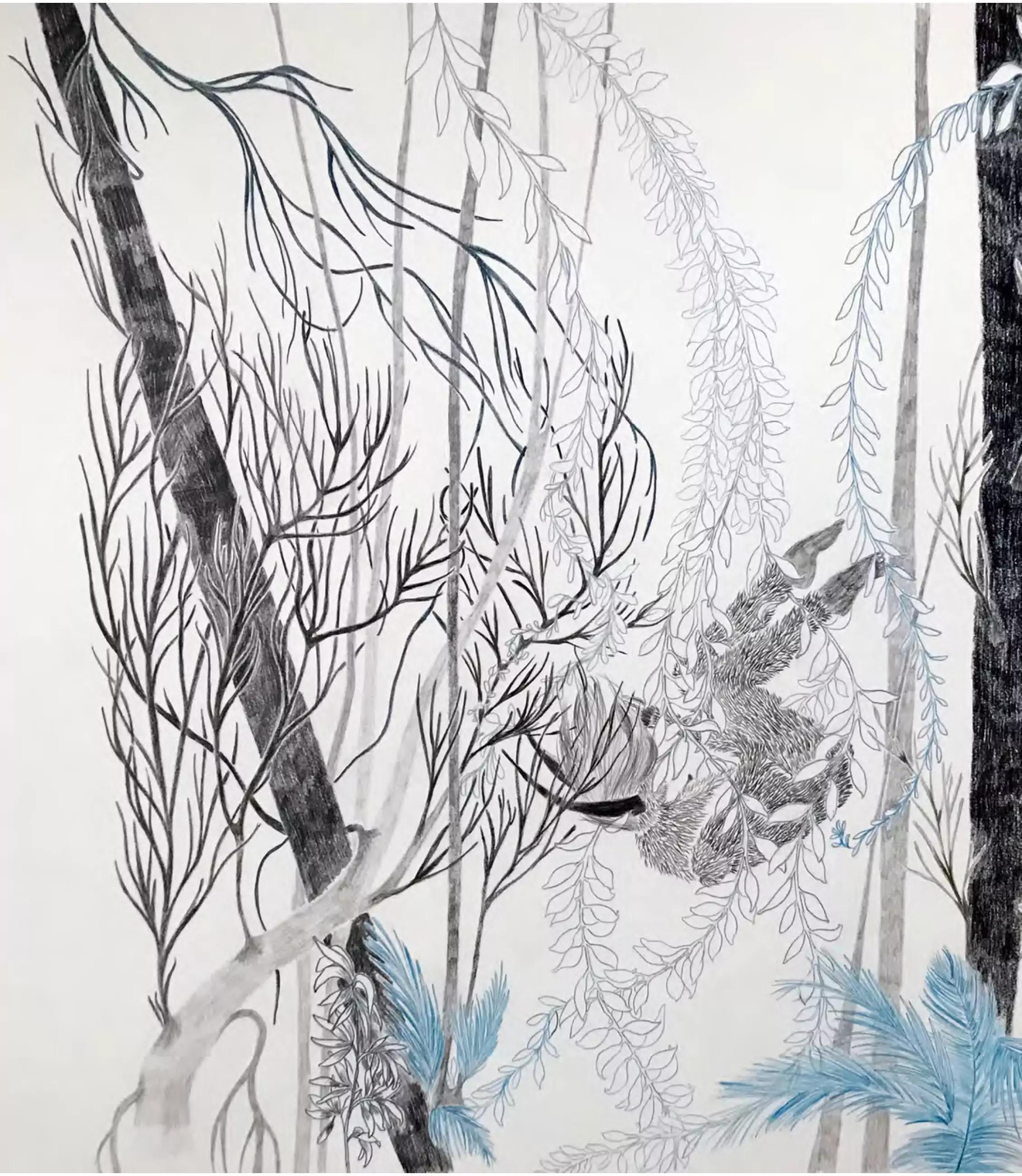
Iconoclasts - Multidisciplinary Artist

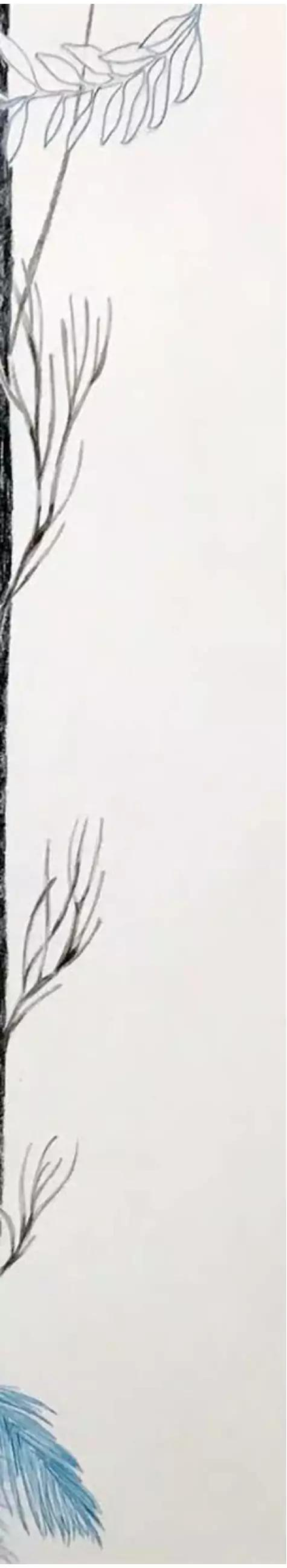
Rachel Hardouin

Hélène Barrier lives and works in Paris. Her work consists of deconstructing what is established, what causes pain, what makes individuals vulnerable. Hélène Barrier explores "indefinite," traversing artistic practices such as embroidery, drawing, ceramics, installations and dance. In her performances, she engages her body and her perception of the world in the chorus of unique cabarets. Places of flesh and soul.

↓ **97** Symbiosis I, graphite pencil and coloured pencil drawing on Arches paper, 50 x 65 cm, 2023







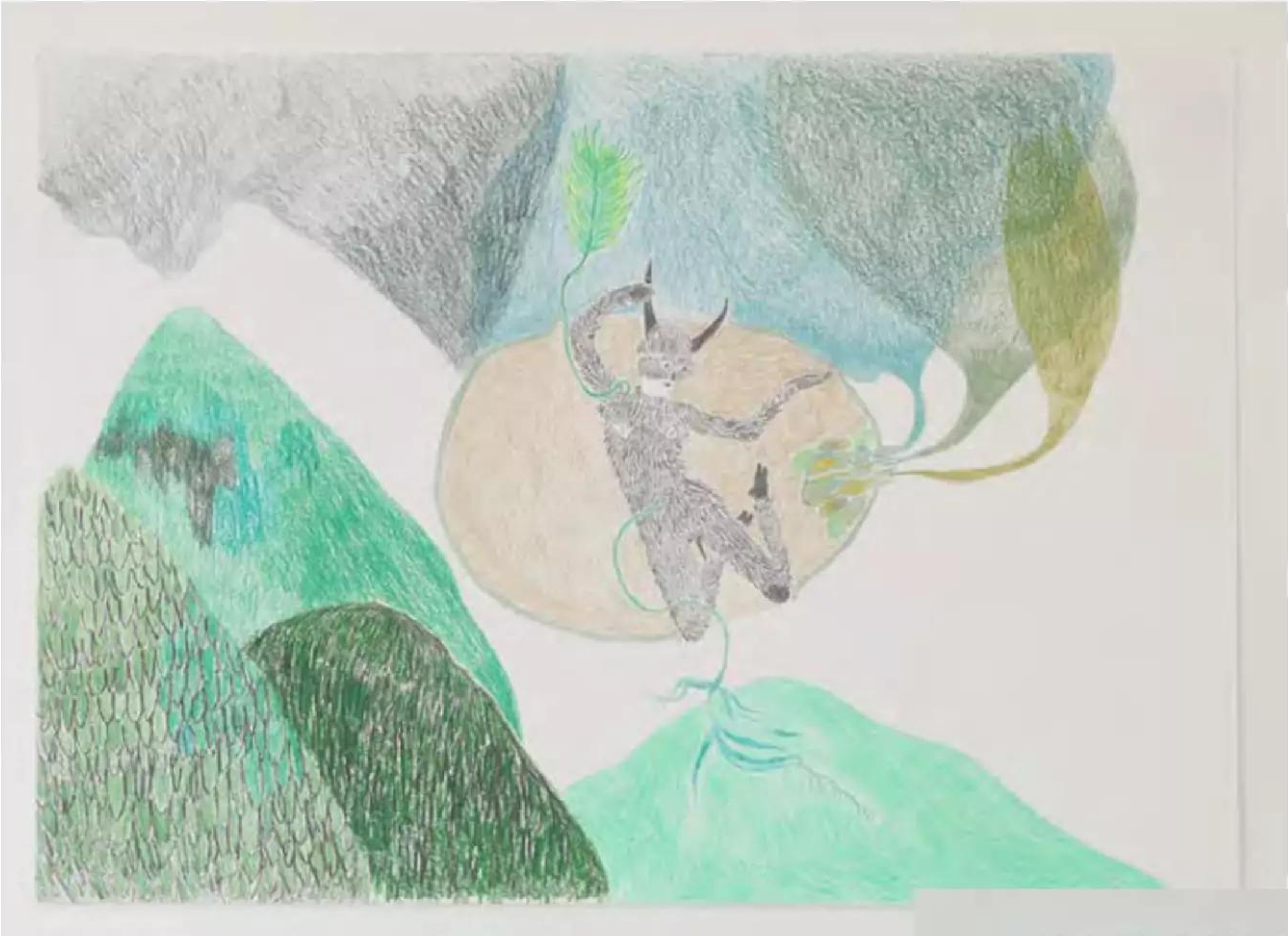
↑ **98** Symbiosis II, graphite pencil and coloured pencil drawing on Arches paper, 50 x 65 cm, 2023

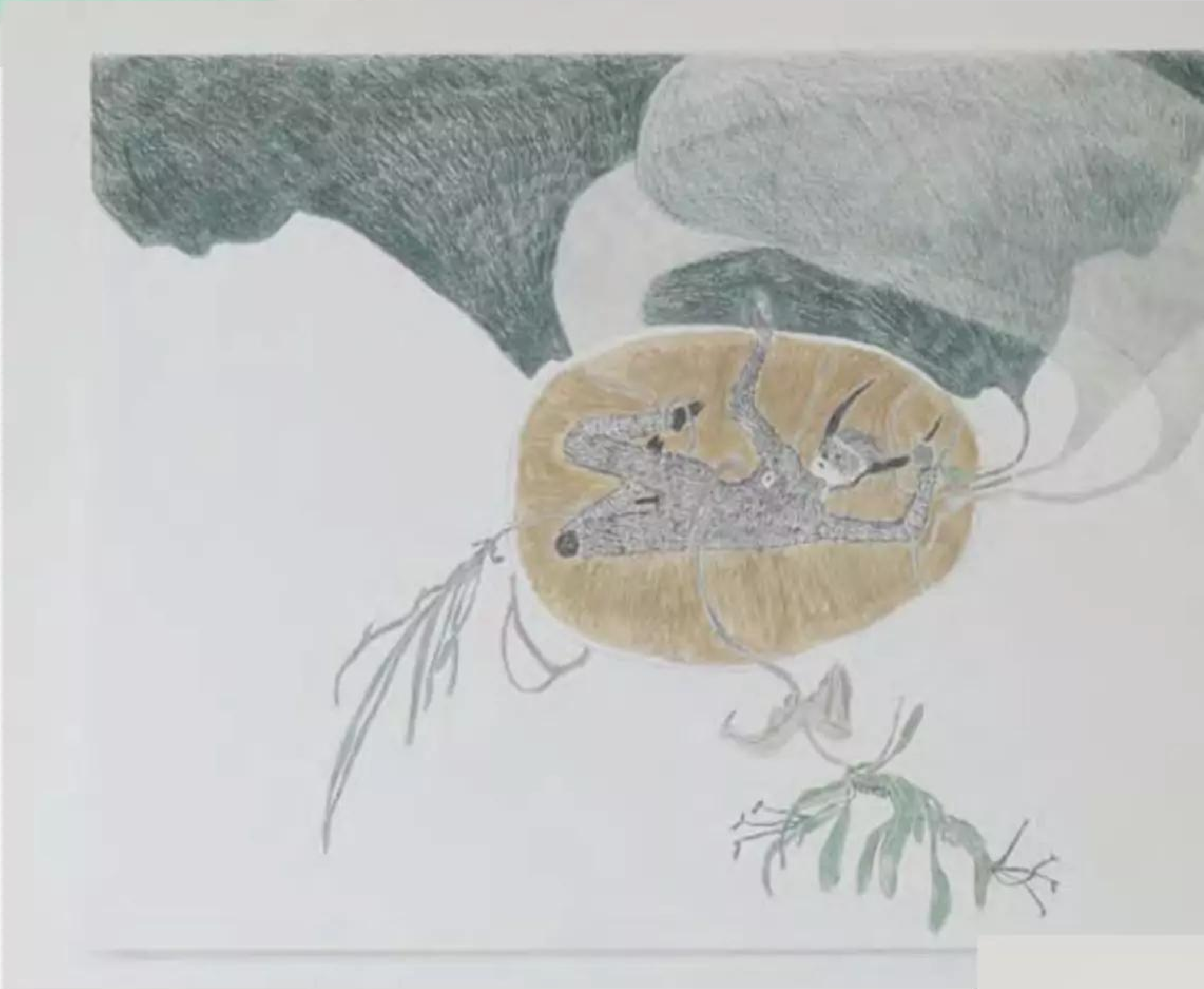
Hélène weaves a committed narrative, a breath of fresh air, taking a step back from our society to explore gender, power, spirituality, the animal kingdom, family... in a lively, insider's view of underground Paris. The topography of bodies is fluid and rebellious.

I met Hélène Barrier more than fifteen years ago through the staging of a baroque-style armchair. All you had to do was sink deep into the cardinal purple velvet fabric to be enveloped in its sprawling arms and surrender to the dreams suggested by the organic shapes and textures of this unusual piece of furniture. A refuge with new proportions, intriguing enough without being frightening.

Hélène Barrier's work is sprawling, like the subtle octopus tattooed by Philippine Schaefer that travels across and draws on her leg. Her interest in others, her critical view of the world, and her curiosity about traditional and innovative artistic techniques guide her with spontaneity and rigour towards the creation of a paradigm, that of the link between humans and nature.

Over time, the figure of the Minotaur emerged for her as a twin figure, a symbol of the breaking down of barriers and the unnaturalness denounced throughout her work.





Is the Minotaur a source of inspiration or a reinterpretation of an ancient myth?

The Minotaur is my alter ego. I slip into his skin and imagine our connection to nature and our animality. He surpasses me. I surpass him. I surpass him in the sense that I take him out of the historical context of the myth of his birth from the union between Pasiphaë and the white bull. The figure of the Minotaur, born of this unnatural union, gives me a pretext to look at our world from a different angle, to open up new perspectives, to echo my work with the research of other artists, researchers, philosophers and sociologists.

During my performances, I wear accessories that I have cut out, sewn and embroidered myself. I slip into his mind and his proportions. These performances are based on my practice of butoh dance.

This horned animal head offers a second individuality, a transcendence of anthropocentricity. Behind this new face, I play another role, whose composition I imagine entirely, with animal postures, guttural sounds, wild accents, echoes of animist rituals.

The time of performance reconnects me to the world, I try to escape from this labyrinth where I live locked up. It is the Minotaur speaking (laughs).

It is a powerful act to convey this message on stage: through this new figure, I am talking about difference, about a different relationship with otherness, the strange, the foreign, the human, the animal… or the hybrid.

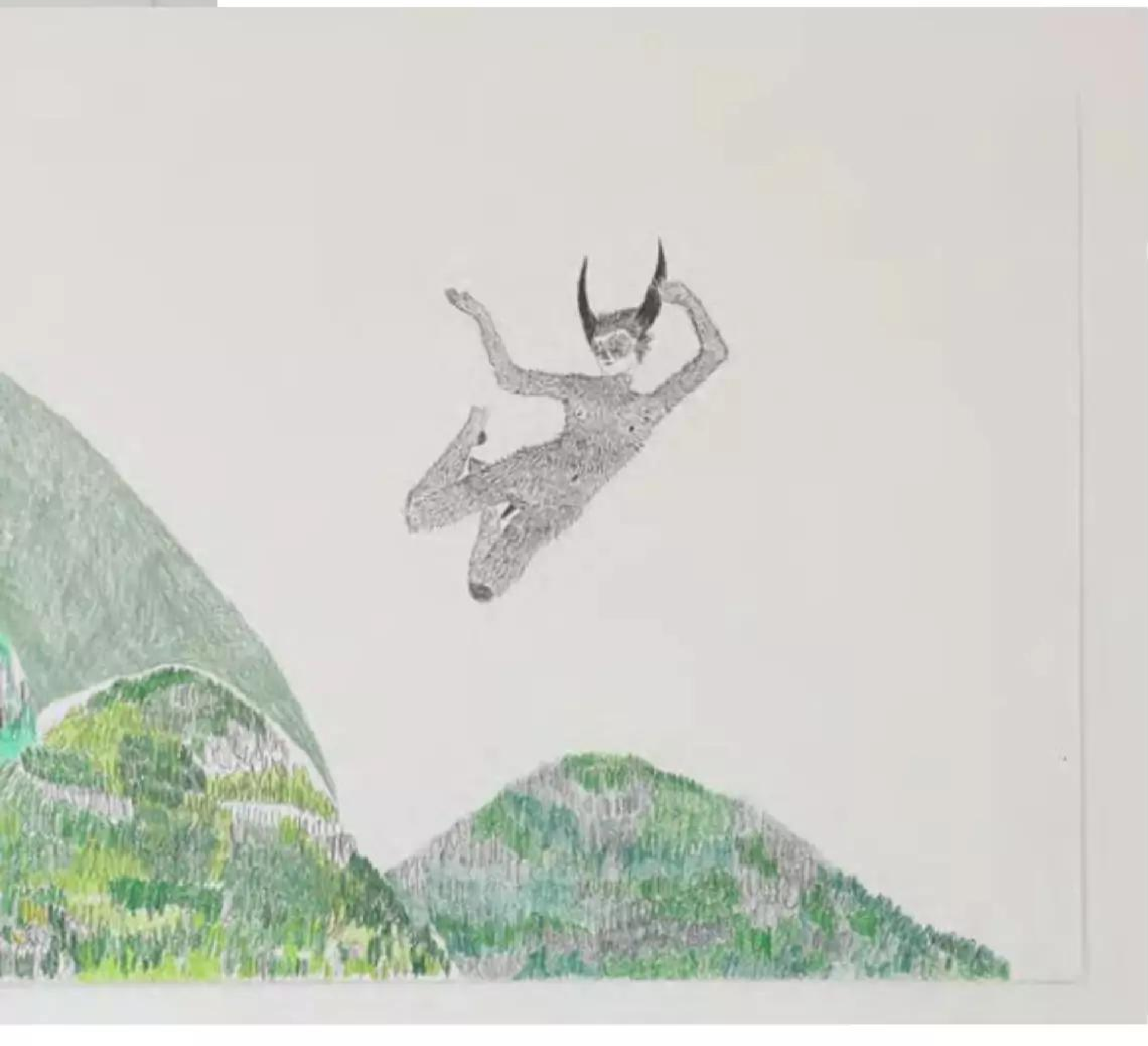
The Minotaur: a figure of exclusion or a symbol of emancipation and liberation?

The Minotaur is THE monstrous figure of Greek mythology. He haunts our imagination – especially mine! – symbolising the animalistic side of humans. During carnival celebrations, people like to slip into a different skin, play, dance, sing... embody a role other than the social role that sticks to them. Under the mask, they can do anything, interact without restraint, and also reconnect with the world of childhood, wonder and fear.

By embodying the Minotaur, a true shape-shifter, I experience this connection.

The genealogy and drawings of the Minotaur that I produce daily represent a world that is half real, half fantasy, from an ecofeminist perspective, in response to the violent and reductive supremacism that is emerging in the world.

This ancient myth, which I am redefining in light of our era's demands on marginalised individuals, takes on its full meaning. It is a way of illustrating the transmission of knowledge, the ability to think about this world, and also to pass it on from generation to generation.



↑ **99** Greenland 1, 2 and 3, triptych, graphite pencil and coloured pencil drawing on Arches paper, 30 x 42 cm

You mix all kinds of materials to create. Is this a choice that defines your approach?

Indeed, I create by imagining the fluidity between materials, like modules that complement and interchange with each other.

I discover and learn techniques where my whole body takes and gives, I engage in an exchange with the constraints of the materials.

For example, covering my body with organic shapes (balloons) – breasts, fat, sweat, cellulite, pustules... – which I pierce during the performance Serpentes in homage to Monique Wittig's text (Le Corps lesbien). Her research and reading her writings are a real discovery, which has a profound effect on me. I felt different before and after reading them. I immediately wanted to embody her words. I started by drawing a lot. I used these drawings to make the costume, then I drew again based on the images created for the performance. It's like a back-and-forth, a breath between mediums.

I was deeply affected by the world of Louise Bourgeois, which still stays with me today. Her work, both through her sculptures and textile objects, through her combination of materials and the power of her thinking, as a creative woman, a woman who tries to free herself from the weight of her father, from the weight of patriarchy in general, moves me deeply.

The Mona Minotaure ceramic, for example, depicts a rarely seen entity: a Minotaur.

In this sculpture, the woman and the animal become indivisible, serenely, in a perspective of reconciliation, where difference becomes a positive value.

Working on this project with earth seemed important to me in order to anchor this message. Earth, soil, foundation, matrix.

The Minotaur is distilled throughout my work; it is a chimerical being that guides my creations.

→ **100** Union of the Snakes 1 and 2, triptych, graphite pencil and coloured pencil drawing on Arches paper, 50 x 65 cm, 2023

The colour black features heavily in your work. What inspired this choice?

Indeed, I favour the colour black in all my creations!

In contrast to the white of butoh, which aims to neutralise the body, I chose black, which perfectly expresses the rejection of rules.

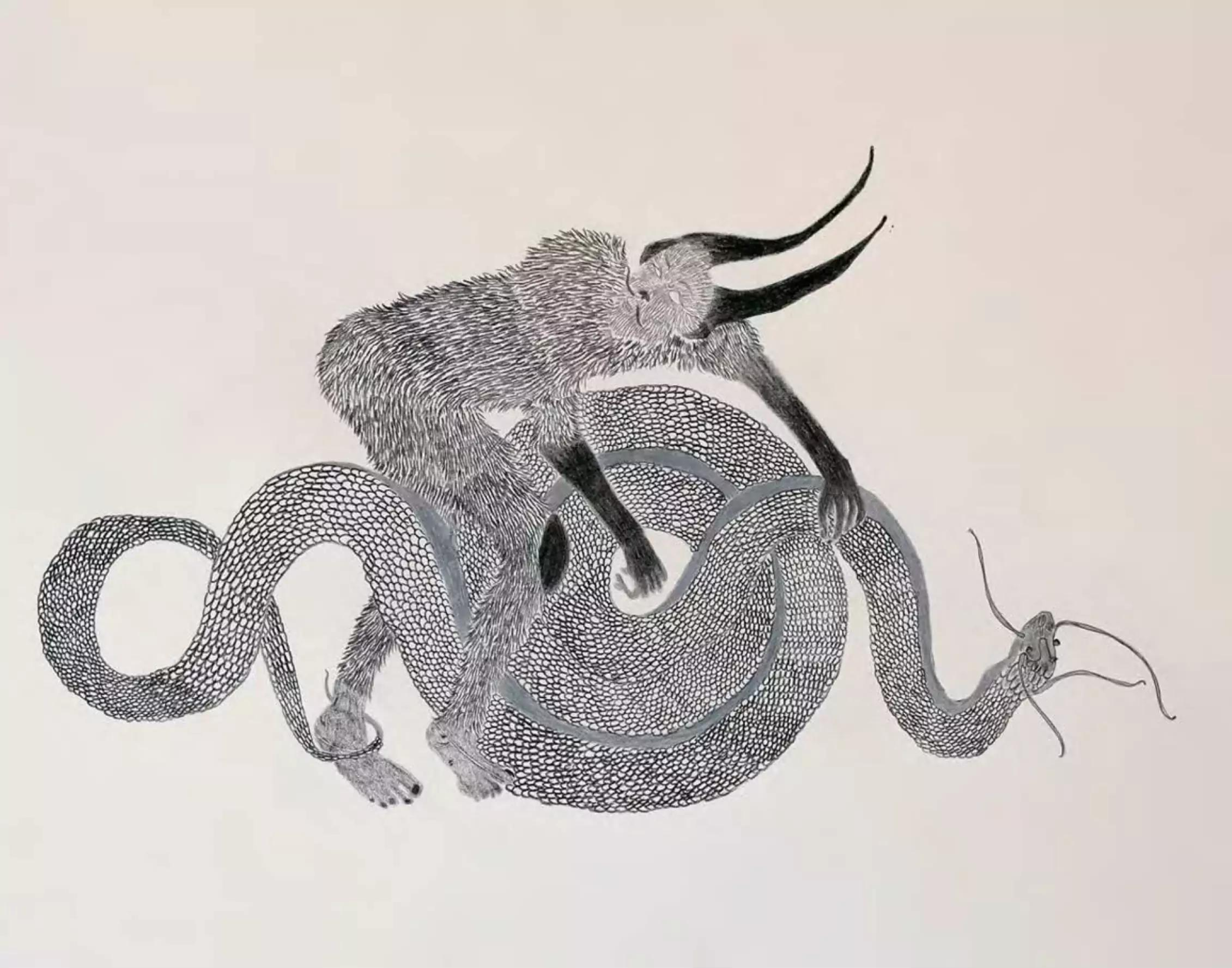
I prefer to play with shades of black, matte, satin, shine, and the texture of materials, inviting light to interpret these aspects. The result is more subtle and nuanced. In ceramics, for example, I like to work with black porcelain, which allows for transparency. This may seem contradictory at first glance, but when you look closely at the piece, you notice the subtleties of black.

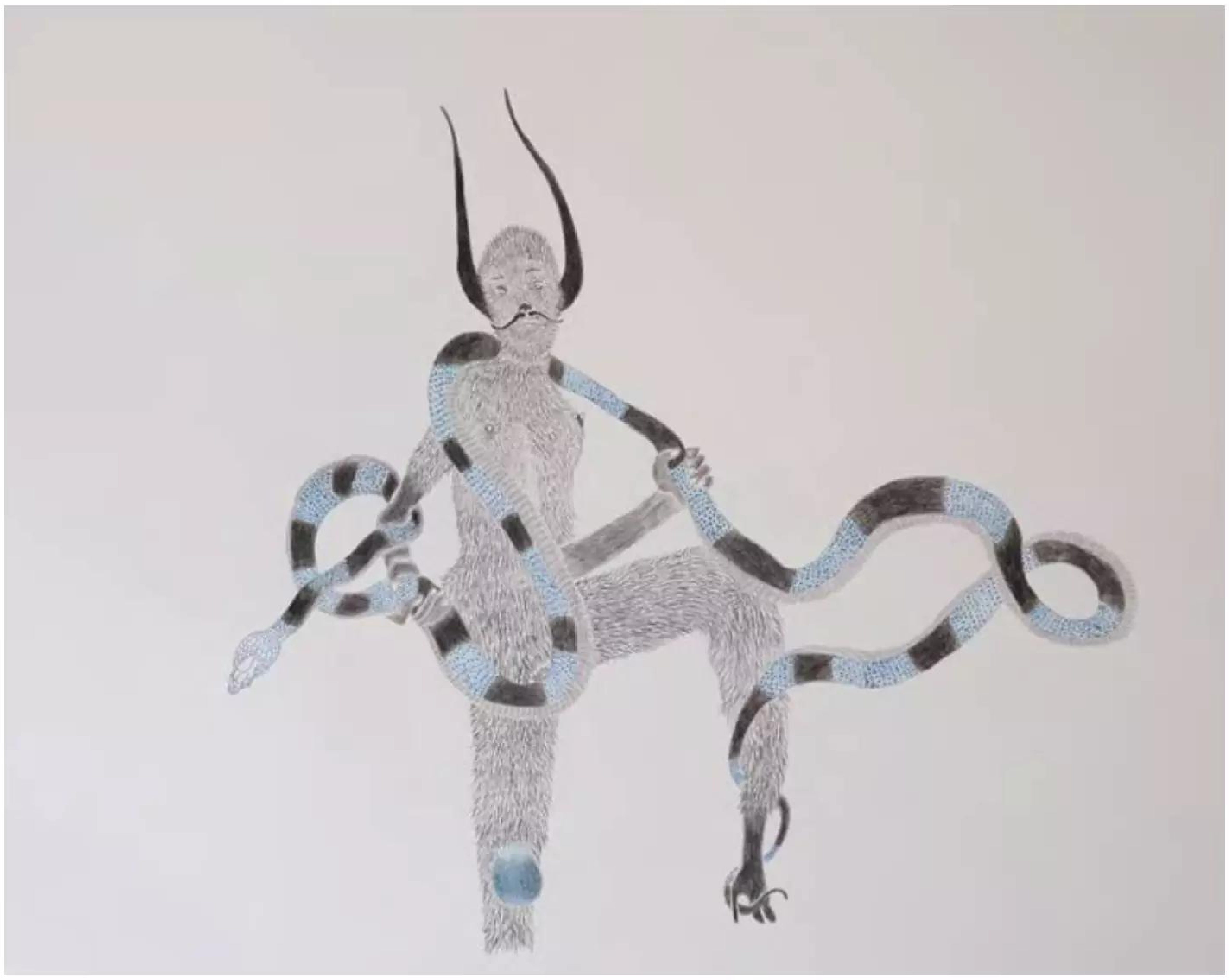
During performances, I slip my white body into this black costume, blurring the lines by creating a genderless being, half-man, half-animal, hairy, deformed, but very much present.

I assert a multiple, even complex identity.

I sign a commitment that brooks no compromise.

I emphasise the monstrous, paradoxical, organic and wild part of ourselves that still exists in each and every one of us.





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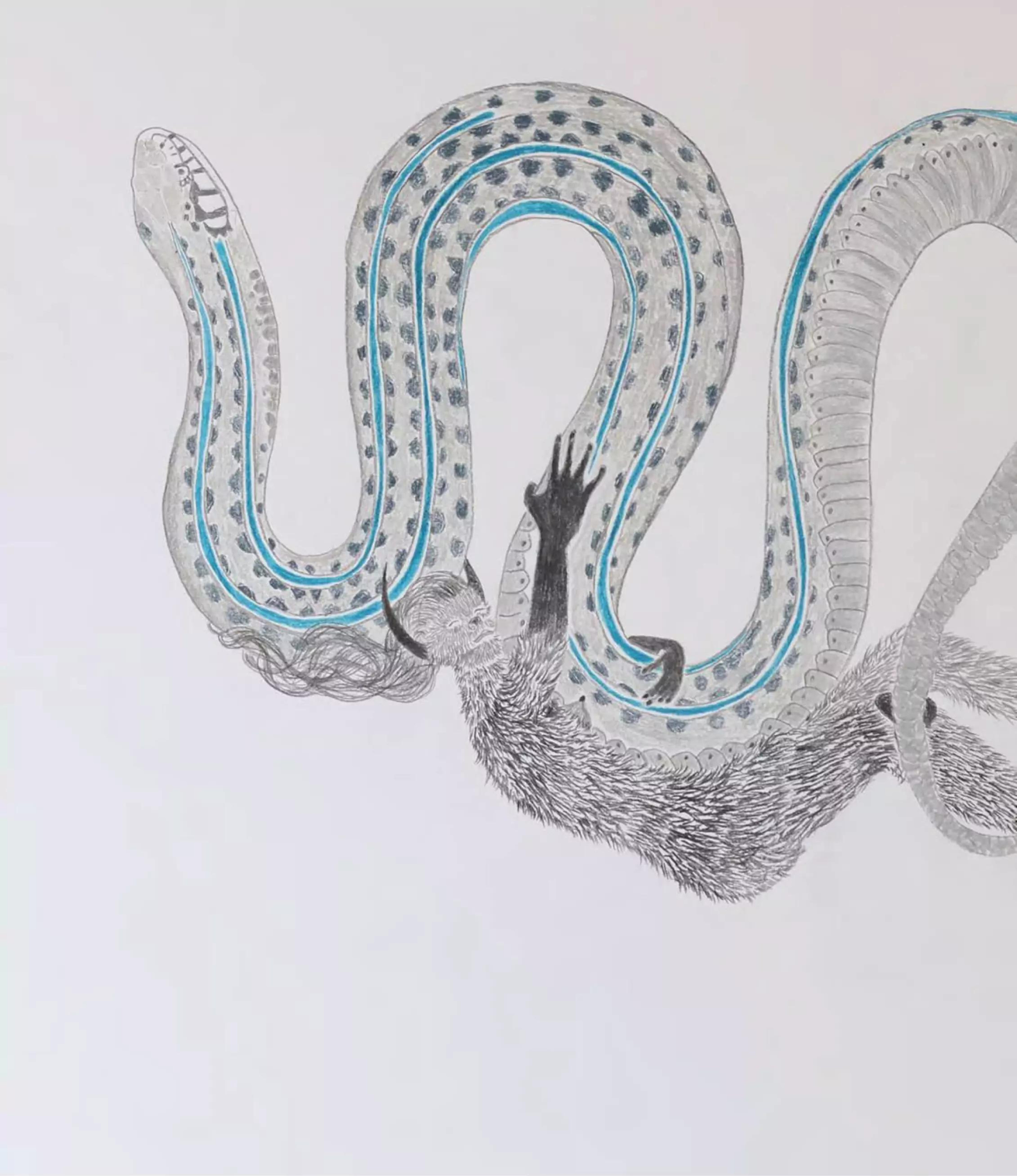

Hélène Barrier is represented
by the Rachel Hardouin Gallery,
15, rue Martel, 75010 Paris

www.15martel.com

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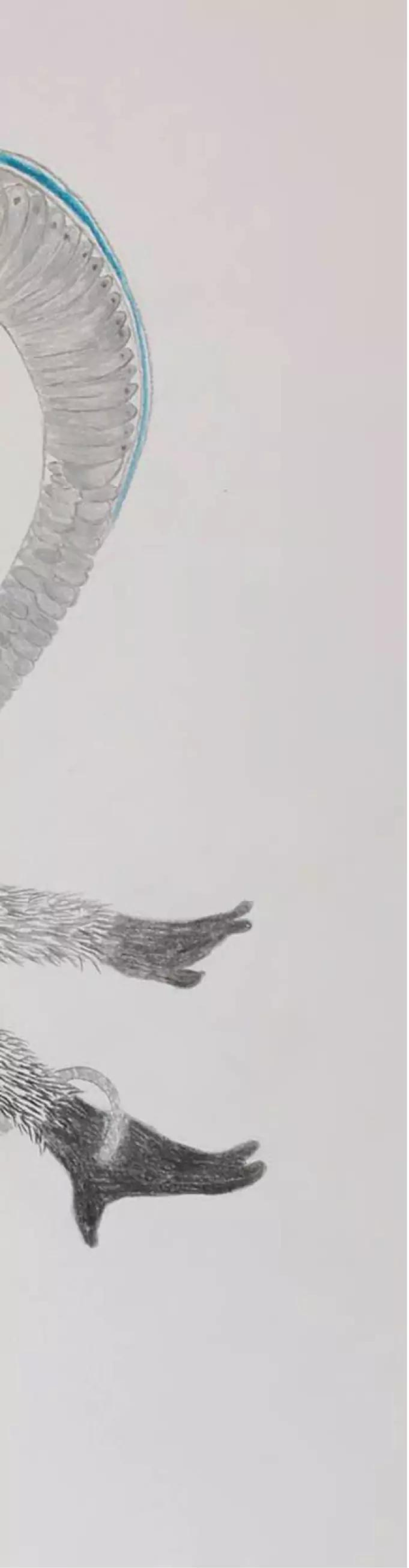

Could we say that your world is freakish?

The world of freaks inspires me greatly. It is strange, unique and vibrant, so different and far removed from what globalised society throws at us and tries to impose on us. Altered identities can and should be displayed, and difference should remain a source of pride in the eyes of others.

My Minotaur is a kind of sublimated freak. He both represents and disfigures me. You could say he transfigures me. In the real world, he produces an image of me that resembles a monster, a chimera, a hybrid being.

My work affirms a porosity between different techniques and questions about humanity and its relationship with the living world. Layers, strata, balls of thread, knots, fabrics, earth, a visible world and a world of roots that communicate with each other.

I explore dance free from all constraints, liberated from formal movement and academic training. Dance is the subtle and magical link between the body and movement, between occupying space. It permeates drawings, ceramics and textile creations, causing them to evolve in the space I create with my body in motion and transformation. Dance extends this work and inscribes it in the space-time dimension.

My approach is deeply carnal, sensual, connected to our emotions and desires. It is a way of opening up spaces of freedom.

The intimate meets the universal.

My protean and polysemic work grapples with questions of good and evil, madness and the destructive violence of men and the world of power.

I expel the monster while offering it a powerful presence.

Chaos arises from the creator being devoured by its creation.

Hélène Barrier's poetic universe invites us to overcome our illusions and inhibitions and allow ourselves to get lost in the labyrinth. It is up to each of us to find the thread and face the Minotaur.

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Revue artistique et littéraire
14
octobre novembre
décembre 2025

The art magazine that gives artists a voice

Quarterly magazine

ISSUE 14 -
October November December 2025

Featured artists

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